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# **Heating Up the Argument -- A Look at Friction and the Soundness of the Rapid Decisive Operations (RDO) Concept**

**A Monograph  
by  
Lieutenant Colonel Todd J. Ebel**

**Infantry**



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## ABSTRACT

Heating Up the Argument -- A Look at Friction and the Soundness of the Rapid Decisive Operations (RDO) Concept by LTC Todd J. Ebel, USA, 70 pages.

One goal of the United States (US) is a capabilities-based joint force designed to quickly achieve success along the continuum of conflict ranging from peace operations to war.<sup>1</sup> In support of this goal, US Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) authors crafted an integrated Joint Operational War-fighting (JOW) on 15 August 2002. This concept based upon emerging "Effects-Based Operations" (EBO) and Rapid Decisive Operations" (RDO) concepts. The JOW concept desires a quick and decisive solution, one in which the enemy submits to a rapid strike of superior joint force against critical nodes of an opponent.<sup>2</sup> This concept of using overwhelming power to be decisive is not new –it reflects our US military culture. Consequently, the question to ask is "what is different?"

One thing that is different about the emerging RDO concept is the growing belief and acceptance that enhancements in information technology will enable joint planners to rapidly assess and rapidly adapt plans to correspond to changing situations.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the JOW concept suggests that commanders and staffs at the operational level can quickly gain situational awareness and thus develop solutions to operational problems faster than the enemy thus rendering the enemy's actions more predictable and easier to counter.<sup>4</sup> Is this working hypothesis valid? Will decisions for employment of combat power based on more information, quickly shared among more services and agencies enable the US military to rapidly and decisively defeat its opponent?

This monograph examined the soundness of RDO concept for full - spectrum operations at the operational level of war? Using "friction" as an overarching evaluation criterion, this paper first determined that the concept's definition is imprecise and can create confusion. Second, it determined the concept's suitability for full-spectrum operations is suspect. There are clearly many situations where the US military is called upon to not rapidly win decisively but rather the US employs its military force to support diplomacy, or conduct peacekeeping or humanitarian tasks. In short, this monograph determined that the military expediency of rapidly employing overwhelming force might be politically unsupportable or physically unachievable. The concept's published focus on the rapid employment of overwhelming combat power in small-scale contingencies potentially masks its universal applicability challenges. The RDO concept is not a sound full spectrum tool for the operational level of war. It should be rewritten.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard B. GEN Myers, *Joint Vision Revision Statement*, Final Draft Version (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 12 Dec 2002), 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> John DeFoor, *Joint Operational Warfighting (JOW) –Thoughts on the Operational Art of Future Joint Warfighting*, 15 August 2002, (on-line): available from [https://home.je.jfcom.mil/QuickPlace/innovation/PageLibrary85256Aff006200B2E.nsf/h\\_Toc/ED6814E19C75A4D785256BFB005607B0](https://home.je.jfcom.mil/QuickPlace/innovation/PageLibrary85256Aff006200B2E.nsf/h_Toc/ED6814E19C75A4D785256BFB005607B0), internet; accessed 21 October 2002, 9.

<sup>3</sup> COL Smith, Daniel, USA (Ret), "Rapid Decisive Operations: Getting the Structure Right," *Military Reform Project –Center for Defense Information*, 30 November 2001 (on-line): available from <http://www.cdi.org/mrp/rdo-pr.html>; internet; accessed 21 October 2002, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 1.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

All concepts are based upon certain beliefs about war, and the validity of the concept depends upon the soundness of those beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

One goal of the United States (US) is a capabilities-based joint force designed to quickly achieve success along the continuum of conflict ranging from peace operations to war.<sup>2</sup> To support this goal, US military authors have recently crafted an integrated *Joint Operational Warfighting* (JOW) concept based heavily upon emergent *Effects-Based Operations* (EBO) and *Rapid Decisive Operations* (RDO) concepts. The RDO concept desires a quick and decisive solution, one in which the enemy submits to a rapid strike of superior US joint forces against critical nodes of an opponent.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of using superior forces to be decisive in warfare is not dramatically new to Americans. In his book, *The American Way of War*, historian Russell Weigley noted that as the wealth of the United States increased, the general direction taken by most American strategists, through most of the time span of American history, was a strategy of annihilation.<sup>4</sup> Weigley

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Schmitt, "A Practical Guide for Developing and Writing Military Concepts," *DART Working Paper*, 12. Schmitt is the chief author of a working paper sponsored by the Defense Adaptive Red Team (DART). DART is a pilot project intended to challenge the joint community to develop more robust and resilient concepts for conducting joint operations. This specific working paper's purpose is to provide a common framework and practical guidelines for developing and writing military concepts and for evaluating the validity and quality of those concepts.

<sup>2</sup> GEN Richard B Myers, *Joint Vision Revision Statement*, Final Draft Version (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 12 Dec 2002), 7-8.

<sup>3</sup> John DeFoor, *Joint Operational Warfighting (JOW) – Thoughts on the Operational Art of Future Joint Warfighting*, 15 August 2002 (on-line): available from [https://home.je.jfcom.mil/QuickPlace/innovation/PageLibrary85256Aff006200B2E.nsf/h\\_Toc/ED6814E19C75A4D785256BFB005607B0](https://home.je.jfcom.mil/QuickPlace/innovation/PageLibrary85256Aff006200B2E.nsf/h_Toc/ED6814E19C75A4D785256BFB005607B0), internet; accessed 21 October 2002, 1. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), xx–xxi. According to Weigley, many military thinkers throughout American history believed that the sole aim of war was the complete destruction of the enemy's forces; consequently, the battle that accomplished this was the end of all strategy. This approach was consistent with the strategic thinking of the times, much of which was influenced by Clausewitz's focus on decisive battle in *On War*. However, while a *Strategy of Annihilation* was preferred, it clearly

furthermore pointed out that one trend in the evolution of the American conception of war was to secure victory efficiently; he stated,

once American military power became great enough to make the destruction of the country's enemies an object worth contemplating, a central theme of the history of American strategy came to be the problem of how to secure victory in its desired fullness without paying a cost so high that the cost would mock the very enterprise of waging war.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, theorist Richard Simpkin, in his book, *Race to the Swift*, pointed out that technological developments in warfare to include advancements in chemical warfare, aviation, mechanization and airborne forces convinced other nations that victory could be achieved more rapidly and at lower costs. Simpkin stated "these [new] ways of war offered a means of obtaining a quick decision...with a minimum of death and lasting disablement."<sup>6</sup> While not necessarily new, some of the RDO concept's tenets are different from Wiegley's and Simpkin's observations. For US operational level planners these differences may generate several concerns.

One potential concern centers on the trust that the RDO concept authors place in information technologies to enable rapid and decisive operations. The military's emergent RDO concept reflects a growing belief that enhancements in information technology will enable joint

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was not the only viable approach to warfare. In his work, *The History of the Art of War*, historian Hanz Delbruck placed a greater emphasis than Clausewitz did on some of the challenges to gaining a decisive battle. Delbruck highlighted that in limited warfare, such annihilation was not always possible, either because the political aims or political tensions involved in the war were small or because the military means were inadequate to accomplish annihilation. Consequently, another approach to warfare was distinguishable. Labeled as a *Strategy of Exhaustion*, in this approach, the decisive battle was no longer the sole aim of strategy. This led Delbruck to argue "that the conduct of war and the planning of strategy must be conditioned by the aims of state policy and that once strategic thinking becomes inflexible and self sufficient even the most brilliant tactical successes may lead to political disaster." Gordon A. Craig, *Delbruck: The Military Historian*, ed. Edward M. Earle, *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), 261, 271-273.

<sup>5</sup> Russell Wiegley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), xxii.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Simpkin, *Race to the Swift - Thoughts on Twenty First Century Warfare* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1985), 16. This comment was taken from Swift's treatment of the impact of technology on doctrine development at the operational level and total warfare. Simpkin's remarks reinforce the view that throughout history many theorists have believed improved technologies would enable rapid decisive military solutions at low cost to political conflicts. Of other interest, Simpkin's examination led him to find that a gestation period of between 30 and 50 years exists before the change in technology is fully adopted in doctrine and force structure.

planners to rapidly assess and adapt plans to correspond to changing situations. However in the article "Military Transformation: A Report Card," Sydney Bearman of the International Institute of Strategic Studies noted, "no military has yet unlocked the full potential of information technology."<sup>7</sup> Bearman's observation seems to support recent expressions of uneasiness with the RDO concept's faith in information-age technologies. Others are concerned that leaders will use recent successes from operations in Iraq to justify the concept's validity without exacting proof.<sup>8</sup> This reticence exists because the RDO concept authors seem to blindly accept that improvements in information management systems will enable commanders and staffs at the operational level to gain situational awareness faster than their opponent and thus develop solutions to operational problems faster than the enemy can. According to Colonel Daniel Smith, Chief of Research at the Center of Defense Information (CDI), the RDO concept also suggests a compression of the US military's decision-making process will limit an opponent's warfighting options, rendering that enemy's actions more predictable and easier to counter.<sup>9</sup> Is this working hypothesis valid? Will decisions for employment of combat power based on more information, quickly shared among more services and agencies, truly enable the US military to rapidly and decisively defeat an opponent at the operational level of war?

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<sup>7</sup> Sydney Bearman, ed., "Military Transformation: A Report Card," *Strategic Survey 2000/2001* (London, England: Oxford University Press, May 2001), 32.

<sup>8</sup> There are several articles and monographs that reflect concern with the RDO concept. See bibliography. As of late, several newspaper articles report US leadership supports the RDO concept based on recent success in Iraq. For example, Toby Harnden's article, "Fight Light, Fight Fast Theory Advances," in the *London Daily Telegraph*, dated 14 April 2003, states "the White House is convinced Iraq demonstrates that the new type of warfare can be much more effective than the old model. On the day Baghdad collapsed, Vice President Dick Cheney said the victory was "proof positive of the success of our efforts to transform our military." The concept's acceptance is such that it has become unofficially known as "the Rumsfeld Doctrine." However, in the same article, Harnden points out that some analysts, such as Loren Thompson of the Lexington Institute urge caution in drawing too many lessons from recent operations in Iraq.

<sup>9</sup> COL Daniel Smith, USA (Ret), "Rapid Decisive Operations: Getting the Structure Right," *Military Reform Project -Center for Defense Information*, 30 November 2001 (on-line): available from <http://www.cdi.org/mrp/rdo-pr.html>; internet; accessed 21 October 2002, 1.



Another potential concern for operational level planners is the applicability of the RDO concept across the full spectrum of operations. According to contemporary US Joint doctrine, at the operational level, campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters or other operational areas. While determining which are the best forces to use and ensuring they are available for employment in order to accomplish the strategic aim is arguably one of the operational level planner's critical tasks, for operational planners, keeping the strategic aim in focus is essential.<sup>10</sup> In some future situations, the military expediency of rapidly employing overwhelming decisive force may not be physically feasible or it may not be the best use of military's capabilities to accomplish the desired political objectives. Will the RDO concept really fit these situations?

Clearly there are bound to be certain situations in the foreseeable future where the costs associated with escalating warfare to achieve a conclusive decision rapidly could be deemed intolerable. As Russell Weigley noted "[in modern warfare] a variety of technological and social developments [have deprived] warfare of its ability to produce decisions."<sup>11</sup> Recent history has clearly shown there was many situations where the current US military was called upon to neither rapidly nor decisively win, but rather was employed to support diplomacy, peacekeeping, or humanitarian tasks. The US military presence along the Egyptian and Israeli borders in support of the Multinational Force and Observer mission is a case in point. For over twenty years Americans and coalition partners have been conducting patrols to help keep peace between these traditionally warring nations.<sup>12</sup> Can information age technology really enable the Sinai peacekeeping mission, among many others, to be accomplished more rapidly or decisively?

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<sup>10</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 5-0, Doctrine for Planning Joint Operations* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 13 April 1995), I-2.

<sup>11</sup> Weigley, xxii.

This monograph examines the soundness of the RDO concept for use at the operational level of war. It uses theorist Carl von Clausewitz's discussion of friction in *On War* to develop its primary evaluation criterion; specifically, it examines friction's impact on operational level decision-making. First, friction was chosen to develop the criteria because friction is a constant phenomenon in war.<sup>13</sup> Second, by definition, friction impedes the motion or tendency to motion of one body relative to another – it slows things down; it makes them less rapid.<sup>14</sup> Third, "friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper."<sup>15</sup> Thus, consideration of friction in formulation of the RDO concept is appropriate since "a credible future operating concept reflects the phenomena as it is rather than distorts the phenomena to conform to the desires of the concept."<sup>16</sup>

To evaluate if the RDO concept adequately considers the impact of operational level friction, this monograph is structured into four major parts. First, this study addresses America's quests for rapid, decisive and low cost military solutions to political crises to illustrate why an operational concept such as RDO seems appropriate. Second, this study examines Clausewitz's notion of friction to derive criteria for evaluation of the soundness of the RDO concept at the operational level of war. By itself, the term friction

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<sup>12</sup> Multinational Force and Observer Website, <http://www.mfo.org/main.htm>. US involvement in the independent Multinational Force and Observer Mission (MFO) began 1979. On March 26, 1979, the day that the Treaty of Peace was signed between Israel and Egypt, President Carter sent identical letters to President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin that specified certain U.S. commitments with respect to the Treaty of Peace. These commitments included a promise by President Carter that the U.S. would take the necessary steps to ensure the establishment and maintenance of an alternative multinational force should the United Nations fail to assume this role. In 1982, forces from the 82D Airborne Division deployed to the Sinai. US forces have been there ever since.

<sup>13</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 122.

<sup>14</sup> Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc, 1987), 493.

<sup>15</sup> Clausewitz, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Schmitt, 12.

was deemed to be too broad and ambiguous and thus not very useful as a criterion. As will be shown, research identified several sources of friction that potentially impact on the soundness of the RDO concept. Examination of these sources of friction generated two relevant questions for the scope of this monograph. First, “is the concept easy to understand? Second, “does the concept sufficiently address the political–military tensions characteristics of modern operations that the operational level planner must contend with?” In the third section, anecdotal historical evidence from varied case studies is compared with the derived friction criteria and the RDO concept’s soundness is analyzed respectively. Historical evidence is necessary because “useful future concepts are rarely derived from abstract theoretical premises, but instead are speculations about the future informed by practical lessons of the past.”<sup>17</sup> The last section provides a conclusion with recommendations to improve the RDO concept.

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<sup>17</sup> Schmitt, 12.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Fast, Furious, Yet Safe – America's Preferred Style of War

The enemy who appeared on September 11 seeks to avoid our strengths and constantly searches for our weaknesses. *So America is required once again to change the way our military thinks and fights.*<sup>18</sup>

President Bush, November 2001

Americans are impatient. We like fast food, fast computers, fast cars, CNN Headline News, and quick service. We demand perfection from technology and we do not necessarily like to spend a lot of money or waste resources, although compared to most societies, we have plenty. The diffusion of technology has helped to shape this view of an impatient American culture. In his book, *Lexus and the Olive Tree*, contemporary journalist and author, Thomas Friedman, suggested that advancements in technology involving computerization, telecommunications, miniaturization, and digitization have been key factors forcing the development of the phenomena “globalization” and Americans are leading this progress.<sup>19</sup> At an unprecedented rate, information age technologies have exposed many Americans to opportunities previously considered beyond their reach; they have quickly given many Americans power. In short, information technology has transformed American society. Why should we Americans expect our military's approach to warfare to reflect anything different?

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<sup>18</sup> President George W. Bush. This comment, emphasis added, was captured from President Bush's remarks to the cadets and the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina on December 11, 2002. Ronald Brownstein, “Success in Afghanistan Clouds Military Transformation,” *Newsday.com* (on-line): available from <http://www.newsday.com/templates/misc/printstory.jsp?slug+la%2D121201assess&section=%2Fnews%2Fnationworld%2Fnation>, internet accessed 15 November 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York, NY: First Anchor Books, 2000), 46-72. Friedman's discussion of globalization illustrates well the impact of technology on culture – his view are not limited to Americans; however, many of the examples he uses to support his discussion include American citizens. Also, historian FG Hoffman characterized modern Americans as impatient in his book, *Decisive Force – The New American Way of War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 4-7.

Like the rest of the country, the US military is developing ways to exploit “America’s information edge.”<sup>20</sup> One argument is that information age technologies will permit a fundamentally new way of war. The core premise is that advantages in technology will increase the combat value of units through “information superiority” – the payoff of a system of systems that connects remote sensors, soldiers in the field, commanders, and weapons platforms, thereby enabling the US to overwhelm an opponent’s capacity to take decisive actions in combat with speed and efficiency.<sup>21</sup> “Information superiority,” it is claimed, will now enable modern US forces to rapidly and decisively conduct operations across the spectrum of conflict from major war to peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

The concept of rapidly dominating an opponent is not a fundamentally new way of war for Americans. In his book, *Decisive Force --The New American Way of War*, historian F.G. Hoffman argued that America’s culture has been a prime determinant in how the US military has approached the nature of warfare.<sup>22</sup> Since Vietnam, “the US military [has shown] a marked predisposition for the strategic offensive...employing the economic and technological assets of the nation, to bring to bear a preponderance of power in the most *direct and decisive* manner possible.”<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Americans have frequently sought to achieve overwhelming success with the least expense of time, resources and power. According to Hoffman, Americans “prefer quick

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<sup>20</sup> Richard J. Harknett, “The Risks of a Networked Military,” reprinted from *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*, Vol 43, No.4 (2000); Richard K. Betts, ed. *Conflict After the Cold War* (New York, NY: Pearson Education Inc., 2002), 524. Current doctrinal publications also illustrate the military’s emphasis on exploiting the impact of technology. For example, in the US Army’s capstone warfighting document, *FM 3-0, Operations*, dated 14 June 2001, an entire chapter, Chapter 11, is dedicated to a discussion of information superiority, including a section that specifically addresses the impact of technology on operations.

<sup>21</sup> Harknett, 525.

<sup>22</sup> F.G. Hoffman, *Decisive Force --The New American Way of War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Hoffman, 1.

and decisive results as opposed to limited warfare, and [Americans] see decisive military victories over the enemy's main force as the quickest road to that end."<sup>24</sup> Hoffman traced an evolution of a US style of warfare through four recent conflicts: Vietnam, US intervention in Lebanon, Operation Just Cause in Panama, and Operation Desert Storm. From his research, Hoffman determined that the American military reflects an impatient culture and it is not comfortable when constraints and limitations are placed upon on the use of force, once the decision to employ force has been made. To this end, the Americans have provided its military with the technology and resources required for its "bias for short, intense, conventional and total application of military force."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, America military's hurried culture, Hoffman admits, has contributed to the United States "poor track record in "small wars," which by their very definition are limited and often protracted in time."<sup>26</sup> Hoffman also argued that a degree of institutional resistance to military intervention in low intensity environments exists within the US armed forces. This resistance coupled with "the military's cultural distaste for less than clear-cut situations, more conducive to their preferred operating style," can challenge America's military leadership penchant for a fast and clearly dominant style of warfare.<sup>27</sup>

Historian Arnold R. Isaacs' analysis of the impact of the Vietnam War also helps to understand the current US military culture and the US military's preference for fast and decisive wars. In his book, *Vietnam Shadows –The War, Its Ghost, and its Legacy*, Isaacs noted many US Vietnam-era officers were resentful of the apparent limited public support and political

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 9. Emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 11.

leadership interference in military affairs during the war.<sup>28</sup> Many senior military leaders felt stifled, unable to prosecute the Vietnam War as they saw fit. As a result, these officers passed on their lessons on how future wars should be fought to today's post-Vietnam generation of officers. Issacs determined many Vietnam veterans felt "any future war must be short, with an absolute minimum of authority for commanders to "fight and win" without restrictions imposed by civilian authorities."<sup>29</sup>

Journalist Michael Ignatieff, in his book *Virtual War*, reinforced Hoffman's and Isaac's views that the American military prefers using its technological advantage to prosecute warfare quickly, intensely, and with *virtual impunity*. Ignatieff argued that the threat of nuclear escalation during the Cold War resulted in the modernization of more precise and more survivable conventional weapons that could limit collateral damage. Increasing the accuracy and distance of US weaponry continues to empty the battlefield and is changing how Americans view warfare.<sup>30</sup> During the 1991 war in Iraq, for example, many Americans had access to repetitive showings of aerial delivered precision munitions against Iraqi facilities. This picture of warfare, coupled with less than one-percent casualties of the total US fighting force in less than 100 days helped to condition how today's Americans view warfare. Technological enhancements in US weaponry, communications and information systems since Desert Storm should support an increase in survivability as well as an increase in the speed and lethality that the US military can prosecute warfare. Accordingly, an expectation of rapid, decisive and casualty-free fighting can be found among many Americans.

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<sup>28</sup> Arnold R. Isaacs, *Vietnam Shadows* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 70-72.

<sup>29</sup> Isaacs, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 161-215. Emphasis added.

However, Ignatieff indicated that the American military's preference for a rapid, technologically dominant with nominal casualties style of warfare, free of political leader micro-management, may not achieve the desired results. Ignatieff argued the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo was characterized by a strong dependence on technology, from precision bombs to cell phones, but not ground troops. Politically pressured from a vocal minority to do something to stop Serbian supported aggression against Kosovars, President Clinton decided to support a NATO effort in the region with US armed forces. Thus, without a formal declaration of war, a US led NATO intervention in Kosovo began with a large coalition air campaign aimed at the destruction of Serbian ground forces. According to Ignatieff, the uncertainty of outcomes inherent in the Kosovo campaign contributed to President Clinton's approval of aerial strikes only; he denied the use of ground troops in the war effort, against advice from General Wesley Clark, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe.<sup>31</sup> The aerial bombardment of Serbian field forces, it was hoped, would quickly create military conditions necessary to support peace process – to get Milosevic, the Serbian leader, back to the negotiating table.<sup>32</sup> During the seventy-eight day air campaign, the coalition flew over 34,000 sorties, but the results of the effort were unclear -- the air campaign "achieved such an ambiguous result."<sup>33</sup> Ground troops eventually entered Kosovo and the Serbian aggression was halted. But according to Ignatieff, the intervention was not decisive, the Kosovo campaign "ended without complete victory – and it wasn't the one [General Clark] would have fought had he been alone at the controls."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ignatieff, 92, 93, and 179.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 93.



The legacy of Vietnam, coupled with the US operational experience in Iraq and Kosovo helps to illustrate the US military's view on how force, when committed, should be applied. In short, when America's armed instrument of national power is unleashed to resolve political problems, preferably as a tool of last resort, the US military favors capitalizing on its comparative advantages in resources and technology to quickly overwhelm its opposition with mass and firepower and with nominal, if any, casualties.<sup>35</sup> Given this cultural preference for short, fast, and safe wars, it is not surprising that the 2001 Defense Planning Guidance assigned Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) with the responsibility to "develop new joint war-fighting concepts that will improve the ability of future joint force commanders to *rapidly* and *decisively* conduct particularly challenging and important operational missions."<sup>36</sup> In response, JFCOM published the Rapid Decisive Operations (RDO) Whitepaper, in August 2001. In July 2002, a second version the RDO Whitepaper was published.

### **There is Will, But is this the Way?**

Since its publication, much has been written to challenge the adequacy of JFCOM's RDO concept. Several authors have recommended refinements to the concept before its use as a basis for emergent US war-fighting doctrine. Despite many recent professional arguments against the soundness of the RDO concept, General Richard B. Myers, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff,

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<sup>35</sup> Hoffman, 7-12. Hoffman's view of the new American approach is manifest in what is commonly referred to as the "Powell Doctrine." General Colin Powell, former Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff made famous the so-called "Powell Doctrine" as part of the run up to the 1991 Gulf War. Powell believed that forces should only be deployed when national interest, commitment, and support have been established. However, once those conditions have been met, there should be use of overwhelming force in the military encounter - rather than proportional response. After victory, the military should leave the field of engagement, rather than staying around as peacekeepers. It has been argued that the Doctrine follows from principles laid out by Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger: *Is a vital US interest at stake? Will we commit sufficient resources to win? Are the objectives clearly defined? Will we sustain the commitment? Is there reasonable expectation that the public and Congress will support the operation? Have we exhausted our other options?* See "Powell Doctrine," *Wikipedia*, (on-line): available from [http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powell\\_Doctrine](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powell_Doctrine), accessed 27 Mar 2003.

<sup>36</sup> US Joint Forces Command J9 Futures Lab, *Toward a Joint Warfighting Concept: Rapid Decisive Operations*, RDO White Paper Version 2.0 (Suffolk, VA: JFCOM, 18 July 2002), v. Emphasis added. Further references are listed as JFCOM RDO Whitepaper V2.0.

continued to echo the United States leadership's quest for fast solutions to crises even as late as December 2002. In his Joint Vision Statement, GEN Myers stated, "other crises or complex contingencies, such as foreign humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and peace-enforcement operations, will require a *rapid* and *decisive* unified action to achieve national objectives."<sup>37</sup> Currently, the RDO concept serves as a cornerstone in JFCOM's Joint Operational War-fighting (JOW) concept.<sup>38</sup> It is strongly based upon integration of information age technologies to improve knowledge. JFCOM asserts "creating and sharing knowledge is critical to RDO... capabilities for horizontal and vertical integration of C4I help us to develop and use superior knowledge to create decision superiority."<sup>39</sup>

General Myers' goal to develop an operational war-fighting concept that makes more efficient use of information age technologies is noteworthy. Realization of the benefits from improvements in information technologies can indeed enhance US warfighting capability. For example, transponders attached to friendly force vehicles and linked to the global positioning system network can potentially provide operators with a clear visual display of the disposition of assigned friendly forces. Similarly, exploration of the use of computers to increase the ability to coordinate the actions of separate and dispersed forces based upon real time inputs could be beneficial. On the other hand, retired LTG Clarence E. McKnight, former Director Command, Control and Communications Systems, Joint Chiefs of Staff, cautioned against worshipping at a digital altar. McKnight asserts "infatuation with technology breeds insensitivity to alternative

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<sup>37</sup> Myers, 10-11. Emphasis added.

<sup>38</sup> John DeFoor, *Joint Operational Warfighting (JOW) –Thoughts on the Operational Art of Future Joint Warfighting*, 15 August 2002, (on-line); available from [https://home.je.jfcom.mil/QucikPlace/innovation/PageLibrary85256Aff006200B2E.nsf/h\\_Toc/ED6814E19C75A4D785256BFB005607B0](https://home.je.jfcom.mil/QucikPlace/innovation/PageLibrary85256Aff006200B2E.nsf/h_Toc/ED6814E19C75A4D785256BFB005607B0), internet; accessed 21 October 2002,1.

<sup>39</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V2.0, x. C4I is the acronym for Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence.

and often better tactical and operational solutions to military problems... the estimate of [US] military power [must] be tempered by a realistic appraisal of what C3I systems can and cannot be expected to accomplish.”<sup>40</sup>

Similarly in his book, *Command in War*, military historian Martin Van Creveld concluded that “maybe there does not exist, nor has there ever existed, a technological determinism that governs the method to be selected for coping with uncertainty.”<sup>41</sup> Van Creveld investigated an historical evolution of the command, control and communications function of war. He specifically examined the increased demands that contemporary warfare places on present day command systems given the enhanced complexity, improved mobility and dispersion of forces. He also explored the impacts of technological improvements in command and control and communications systems and assessed an increased vulnerability in modern day command systems. Throughout his study Van Creveld observed command systems continually attempted to reduce uncertainty on the battlefield. In the end, Van Creveld cautioned,

To believe that the wars of the future, thanks to some extraordinary technological advances yet to take place in such fields as computers or remotely controlled sensors, will be less opaque and therefore more subject to rational calculations than their predecessors is, accordingly, sheer delusion.<sup>42</sup>

Van Creveld’s and General McKnight’s comments suggest development of an operational concept, such as RDO, must be practicable, it must be based upon on reality. At risk is the credibility of the RDO concept itself. While technology can influence an American military operational warfighting concept, fixation on single style of warfare, one that is short, intense, and yet safe, may not achieve the results desired.

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<sup>40</sup> Clarence E. McKnight, *Control of Joint Forces --A New Perspective* (Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 1989), xiii. C3I is the acronym for Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 275.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Why Friction?

The good general must know friction in order to overcome it whenever possible, and in order not to expect a standard of achievement in his operations which this very friction makes impossible.<sup>43</sup>

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

There is a long history of how military forces have harnessed improvements in technology to shape warfare. Often the aim has been to make warfare more rapid because speed in execution of operations can have some advantages. For example, in the Army capstone manual, FM 3-0, *Operations*, contemporary US doctrine argues that in offensive operations “a faster tempo allows attackers to disrupt enemy defensive plans by achieving results quicker than the enemy can respond.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, in the midst of a period of transformation, it is not surprising that the US military is wrestling with the concept of how to use new technology to improve upon its preference for a rapid and decisive approach to warfare.

In the 2001 RDO White paper, the JFCOM authors are clearly advocates for rapidity in operations. The document states,

The concept of operational rapidity is both absolute and relative... Rapidity... is enhanced when we have the ability to use knowledge to reduce mass, thereby increasing rapidity of movement by identifying and deploying the right capabilities needed to achieve the desired effects instead of all the capabilities we might need to meet an unspecified range of actions. Rapid resolution is accomplished by intense, unrelenting application of all sources of U.S. and multinational capability.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Van Creveld, *Command in War*, 266.

<sup>43</sup> Clausewitz, 120.

<sup>44</sup> US Army, *FM 3-0, Operations* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 14 June 2001), 7-6.

<sup>45</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V2.0, 11.

On the other hand, what is not clear is if the JFCOM authors thoroughly addressed what can make operations something other than rapid and decisive – friction. Like technology, friction in warfare also has a long history. By definition, friction impedes the motion or tendency to motion of one body relative to another – it slows things down.<sup>46</sup> It is an enduring element in warfare. As Van Creveld noted in a more recent work, *The Transformation of War*, “what makes the problem of friction so intractable is the fact that, the greater the efficiency demanded, the worse it gets.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, a seminal question to ask for this monograph is, “Can friction at the operational level of war really succumb to improvements in information age technology that the RDO concept aims to exploit?”

The notion of friction is not new and it is generally accepted as a constant and lasting element of both war and warfare. Military professionals, students and teachers of the military art often refer to the “fog and friction” of war and a number of scholarly books, papers and articles have addressed this subject in great detail. For this monograph, a complete reconstruction of Clausewitz’s ideas of friction in his theory of war is beyond its scope. Rather it argues that the notion of friction, which is potentially “Clausewitz’s most important single contribution to military thought,” will continue to be a central element of future warfare.<sup>48</sup> Therefore an operational concept that is not thoroughly evaluated with respect to friction is not likely to be a sound concept.

Historian Barry D. Watts’ paper, *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War*, is useful as a guide to understanding the implications of friction on modern operations. From his research,

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<sup>46</sup> Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc, 1987), 493.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1991), 107.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Simpkin, *Race to the Swift* (London: Brassey’s Defence Publishers, 1985), 106.

Watts, a senior analyst for the Northrop Grumman Corporation, cataloged eight causes of friction in warfare. According to Watts, eight sources of friction are: danger, physical exertion, uncertainties and imperfections in the information on which action in war is based, friction in the narrow sense of the resistance within one's own forces, chance events that cannot be readily foreseen; physical and political limits to the use of force, unpredictability stemming from interaction with the enemy, and disconnects between ends and means in war.<sup>49</sup>

Other sources of friction are found in Clausewitz's treatise. For example, in Chapter Sixteen of Book 3, Clausewitz lists "three determinants that function as inherent counterweights and prevent the clockwork [of warfare] from running down rapidly or without interruption."<sup>50</sup> These sources of friction are the fear and indecision native to the human mind, the imperfection of human perception and judgement, and the greater strength of the defensive.<sup>51</sup> In another example, Clausewitz stated "the difficulty of accurate recognition constitutes one of the most serious sources of friction in war, by making things appear entirely different from what one had expected."<sup>52</sup>

Research conducted by LTC James Klingaman, a Fellow in the Advanced Operational Arts Studies Fellowship (AOASF) program at Ft Leavenworth Kansas, also addresses friction, albeit he does so indirectly. In his monograph, "Teaching the Operational Art Using Reflective Practice," Klingaman observed that one perception existing in the modern US Army it is that the Army, as an institution, is not effectively and routinely producing competent professional

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<sup>49</sup> Barry D. Watts, *Clausewitzian Friction and Future War*, McNair Paper 52 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, October 1996), 32.

<sup>50</sup> Clausewitz, 217.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 217-218.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 117.

operational practitioners.”<sup>53</sup> Part of the challenge is that operational art is “an art form consisting of esoteric components like vision, indeterminate knowledge, creativity, and the like,” and the US Army is not skillfully educating its practitioners to be military artists.<sup>54</sup> Klingaman noted that for the most part, US officers selected to serve as operational level planners lack experience or practice and are poorly educated to deal with operational level issues. In this sense, a lack of skilled practitioners of the operational art, serves as a form of institutional friction in the US that impacts on its military’s ability to plan and execute operational level warfare.

### **Choosing Which Sources of Friction to Apply**

The selection of which sources of friction best applied to the operational level of war was not an easy task. Arguably, each of the sources of friction can interrelate; it is almost impossible to precisely describe one source of friction without discussion of another. Upon further review, it seemed that certain sources of Clausewitzian friction were better suited for application strictly at the tactical level of war; yet, tactical level actions can impact operational level decisions. Consideration for choosing the evaluation criteria was also given to the unpublished DART Working Paper, “A Practical Guide for Developing and Writing Military Concepts” because it effectively illustrated that poorly constructed concepts can be a source of friction for operational level leaders.<sup>55</sup>

For this monograph, the sources of friction selected for development of the evaluation criteria were related to the cognitive tension inherent at the operational level of war. According

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<sup>53</sup> LTC James J. Klingaman, “Teaching the Operational Art Using Reflective Practice,” School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, April 2003, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Klingaman, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Schmitt, 19-21. The DART Working Paper lists “attributes of a good future operating concept.” They include the concept serves a stated purpose; it is stated in language that can be acted upon; it accepts the burden of proof. Also, it is differentiated; it establishes explicit relationships to other concepts; it is presented in a clear and precise

to historian Shimon Naveh in his book, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, at the operational level, cognitive tension results from trying to determine how to best achieve strategic aims with limited tactical means in a modern setting. Naveh argued that the operational level of war in contemporary settings is enormously complex and he listed several criteria to outline the complexity of the operational level of war.<sup>56</sup> Other authors similarly support the argument that warfare is very complex and is becoming even more difficult due to shifting trends in the nature of warfare. For example, Van Creveld pointed out “we are entering an era, not of peaceful economic competition, but of warfare between ethnic and religious groups.”<sup>57</sup> Similarly, computers are also changing the dynamics in warfare by increasing the tempo and precision at which both societies and their military forces can gain access to and process information, move forces, and destroy objects.<sup>58</sup> As a result, Van Creveld argued “that unless societies are willing to adjust both thought and action to the rapidly changing new realities, they are likely to reach the point where they will no longer be capable of employing organized violence at all.”<sup>59</sup>

At the operational level of war, the increasingly complex nature of modern warfare requires a comprehensive approach to war. Circumstances can vary enormously between wars, no two future conflicts will be exactly alike. Consequently operational level commanders have to appreciate a vast array of factors in order to resolve the cognitive tension that exists when designing ways to effectively link modern tactical means to meet strategic aims, they require

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language; it is concise; it is robust, and it promotes debate. A more detailed discussion of these attributes is found in the papers’ text.

<sup>56</sup> Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 13-14.

<sup>57</sup> Van Creveld, *Transformation of War*, ix.

<sup>58</sup> Several authors have addressed the changing environment is shaping modern warfare. The RDO concept’s authors are no exception. In the JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, Section 2 dedicates several paragraphs specifically oriented on “the emerging security environment.” See JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> Van Creveld, *Transformation of War*, ix.



*creativity* as a basic quality.<sup>60</sup> Their “modes of thinking must be... entirely different from those exercised in the traditional fields of tactics and strategy.”<sup>61</sup> An operational concept “must reflect the notion of synthesis, through the aspects of combined arms combat, *amalgamation of the various forms of warfare*, and the integration of the various forces and formations within several geographical units and different dimensions of time.”<sup>62</sup> Therefore, an operational concept that advances a single or specialized approach to warfare, versus a more comprehensive approach can limit an operational level commander’s creativity and can potentially contribute to increasing the cognitive tension inherent at the operational level of war.

Two sources of friction that Clausewitz identified, the imperfection of human perception and the judgment and the uncertainties and imperfections in the information on which action in war is based, can directly contribute to the cognitive tension inherent at the operational level of war. As such, they provided a clear direction for selection of the first evaluation criterion. To reduce the potential friction addressed, a war-fighting concept written for application at the operational level of war should, as a minimum, be easy or simple to understand. The concept’s authors and its practitioners must share a similar understanding of what is expected; otherwise, the authors likely risk increasing the very friction they intend to mitigate.

Secondly, for the RDO concept to be considered suitable for application across the full spectrum of warfare, it must be able to withstand the burdens of political-military tensions that characterize modern warfare. Clausewitz clearly pointed out that the physical and political limits to the use of force and disconnects between ends and means in war are sources of friction. For a full spectrum operational level concept to be sound, it must reflect an appreciation for the

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<sup>60</sup> Naveh, 12. Emphasis is original.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 13. Emphasis added.

realities of political-military tensions that threaten attainment of rapid and decisive solutions to crises.

### **Criteria Defined**

Easy to Understand. Easy to understand is a straightforward criterion. The concept must be clear and unambiguous; it should not have to provide additional explanation to clarify its primary message. The concept should not contradict itself and finally, it should be concise “so its message can be absorbed and kept in mind while being acted upon.”<sup>63</sup> Lack of clarity could result in the audience’s misperception of the RDO concept’s intent.

Political-Military Tension. US doctrine states that operational art is “the employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives through the design, organization, integration, and conduct of strategies, campaigns, major operations and battle.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore the concept must be capable of sufficiently guiding operational planners how to rapidly achieve decisive results across the full range of conflict, under a wide range of possible political-military scenarios.

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<sup>63</sup> Schmitt, 20.

<sup>64</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Pub 5-0, Doctrine for Planning Joint Operations* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1 February 1995), I-2.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Friction Applied –Testing the RDO Concept

#### Understanding RDO – Initial Friction

What exactly is RDO and have leaders raised really hard questions to challenge the untested hypothesis? RDO is an emergent operational concept. It argues that the integration of many kinds of sensors and computers, from satellites to remotely planted acoustic devices, will allow the US military to build a “system of systems” that can quickly provide information to any military user who needs it.<sup>65</sup> Its fundamental premise is that increased access to more information shared among joint forces will enable the US military to rapidly and decisively defeat its opponents throughout the full spectrum of conflict. In the RDO Whitepaper, JFCOM claims,

RDO is a concept for future joint operations. It describes the military element of an effects-based campaign against the broader backdrop of all instruments of national power being applied to reach [US] goals and protect [US] interests. A rapid and decisive operation will integrate knowledge, command and control, and operations to achieve the desired political and military objectives. ... the military acts in concert with and leverages the other instruments of national power to understand and reduce the adversary's critical capabilities and coherence. The United States and its allies asymmetrically engage the adversary from directions and dimensions against which he has no effective counter, dictating the terms and tempo of the operation. The adversary, suffering from loss of coherence and operational capabilities and unable to achieve his objectives, ceases actions that are against US interests.<sup>66</sup>

JFCOM authors assert that the successful application of the RDO concept rests with proliferation of technologies leveraged to ensure integration of three core functional

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<sup>65</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, “A Revolution in Warfare,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 75, No.2 (March/ April 1996), reprinted with permission in Richard K. Betts’ book, *Conflict After the Cold War*, 513.

<sup>66</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper V2.0, 9.

competencies: superior knowledge, greater coherence of command and control, and effects-based operations based upon integration of dominant maneuver, precision engagement, and information operations.<sup>67</sup> Stated another way, the RDO concept reflects US military's trust that information technologies will enable the "rapid dominance" of an enemy through the use -- or threat of use of -- "shock and awe."<sup>68</sup> The overriding objective is to apply information age technologies so as to affect, influence and control the will and perception of an adversary quickly, very quickly. A first step to the evaluation of the soundness of the RDO concept for use at the operational level must include a clear understanding of JFCOM's definition of RDO.

JFCOM's RDO Whitepaper clearly emphasizes that information technology facilitates rapid and decisive operations. Comments such as "creating and sharing knowledge is critical to RDO... capabilities for horizontal and vertical integration of C4I help us to develop and use superior knowledge to create decision superiority" and "a rapid and decisive operation will integrate knowledge, command and control, and operations to achieve the desired political and military objectives," help to illustrate this key component.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, JFCOM fails to succinctly define what are "rapid" and "decisive" operations. Ostensibly, "it appears that

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>68</sup> Jerry B. Warner, a Defense Group Inc. analyst, is noted as point of contact for material I used to support this paper. Comments were taken from "Rapid Dominance Concepts,"(on line) available from [http://www.defensegrp.com/war\\_rdconcept.cfm](http://www.defensegrp.com/war_rdconcept.cfm), internet; accessed 17 Feb 2003. The phrase "shock and awe" was used extensively in articles and in papers in support many Defense Group Inc projects supporting the concept of "Rapid Dominance." Work on the "Rapid Dominance" concept has been underway since 1995 and has resulted in two books, *Shock and Awe - Achieving Rapid Dominance*, and *Rapid Dominance - A Force for All Seasons*. Rapid dominance has four central characteristics: total knowledge of self, adversary, and environment; rapidity; brilliance in execution; and the ability to ensure control of the environment. The concept is perceived by its authors to be applicable in times of peace, crisis, and war. The concept's aim is to concentrate US military power to affect, influence and ultimately control the will and perception of an adversary rather than merely destroy or cause attrition of an enemy's capabilities as envisaged under the doctrine of decisive force.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 9.

everything in the concept's definition would apply equally well to an operation conducted in a gradual and limited manner."<sup>70</sup>

The requirement for clear definition of what are rapid and decisive operations seems more relevant today in light of comments shared concerning US led coalition operations in Iraq. In March 2003, on the eve of war in Iraq, presidential spokesman Ari Fleischer emphasized the goal for a rapid campaign. Fleischer stated, "Americans should be prepared for what we hope will be as precise, short a conflict as possible."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, John Pike, an analyst for the Global Security Organization stated, "[In Iraq], what is required is a concept of operations that is both *rapid*, unlike OPLAN 1003, and *decisive*, unlike the Downing Plan."<sup>72</sup> However, both Fleischer and Pike cautioned their audience about the uncertainty of the operational outcomes. Fleischer

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<sup>70</sup> Antulio Echevarria, "Rapid Decisive Operations: An Assumptions-Based Critique" (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, November 2001), 3.

<sup>71</sup> Ari Fleischer's comments were quoted from an Associated Press (AP) Headline Story, *Microsoft Newtork News* (MSN), 19 Mar 2003 (online): available from <http://www.msn.com>, internet; accessed 19 Mar 2003.

<sup>72</sup> John Pike, "Attacking Iraq -Rapid Decisive Operations," *Global Security.org*, (28 December 2002), (on line); available from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq-rdo.htm>; accessed 1 Jan 2003. Emphasis added. Pike's article investigates potential operational concepts aimed at ousting the Saddam Hussein regime. OPLAN 1003 is war plan already prepared and analyzed for operations in vicinity of Iraq and Kuwait. Operations are similar to those represented during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. The Downing Plan is modeled after recent operations in Afghanistan. The concept has the Iraqi National Congress (INC) establishing a firebase inside Iraq, from which it would announce the creation of a provisional Iraqi government [which the Bush Administration would recognize]. The US would begin an intense bombing campaign, as it did in Afghanistan, and airlift thousands of Special Forces troops into southern Iraq. The United States Air Force would systematically bomb key Iraqi command-and-control facilities. Early versions of the plan did not call for a direct military assault on Baghdad, but proposed quick-strike attacks on military units in the north and primarily in the south. If all went as planned, dissent would break out in the Iraqi military, and Saddam Hussein would have to decide whether to send his forces south to attack the Americans or to keep his forces in Baghdad to guard against an invasion from the north. If Saddam's forces counter-attacked, they would be exposed to American air strikes and destroyed. The INC believed that any show of force would immediately trigger a revolt against Saddam within Iraq. According to Clarridge, the "idea from the beginning was to encourage defections of Iraqi units. You need to create a nucleus, something for people to defect to. If they could take Basra [Iraq's second-largest city and major port], it would all be over."]. Pike's document is remarkably insightful. On the other hand, Pike notes the uncertainty of outcomes. He cautions that decisive results may not be achievable rapidly. Pike states, "The biggest uncertainty with any invasion plan revolves around the issue of how Iraqi troops and the civilian population would respond to any US military offensive. If the Iraqis decide to resist and retreat into major urban zones, the conflict could drag on and fighting get bogged down. Optimistic assessments paint the picture of the military turning against Saddam, though this assessment is not backed up by historical precedents. Moreover, US troops are unlikely to rely too much on local support as operations in Afghanistan have shown how unreliable local forces can be in both the planning and conduct of any operation."

remarked, “but there are many unknowns and [the war in Iraq] could be a matter of some duration.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, for the RDO concept to be of substantive value, operational level planners and executors must clearly understand what JFCOM means by its use of the terms “rapid” and “decisive.”

Unfortunately, JFCOM’s lack of clarity in its definition creates anxiety. As LTC Antulio Echevarria, Director of Strategic Research at the Strategic Studies Institute, effectively pointed out in his monograph, *Rapid Decisive Operations: An Assumptions-Based Critique*, tension exists when there is an attempt to combine the frequently competing properties of rapid and decisive:

Speed –defined as “accomplishing the objectives of the campaign as rapidly as possible”—and decisiveness –defined as “imposing our will on the enemy by breaking his coherence and defeating his will and ability to resist” –are relative properties. Each depends on an adversary’s capabilities and will to resist... Neither property should be stressed at the expense of the other.<sup>74</sup>

Other conflicting statements compete against a clear understanding of JFCOM’s description of the RDO concept “focused at the operational level of war.”<sup>75</sup> JFCOM states that RDO is a broad concept built upon two interrelated phases, the first phase occurring at the national and strategic level of war. The aim of the first phase is to influence or deter an adversary using all instruments of national power including military flexible deterrent options. However, while the authors state the RDO concept is based upon two interrelated phases, they really suggested that only phase two, the hostility phase, defines RDO. Implementation of phase

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<sup>73</sup> Ari Fleischer’s comments were quoted from an Associated Press (AP) headline story, *Microsoft Newtork News* (MSN), 19 Mar 2003 (online): available from <http://www.msn.com>, internet; accessed 19 Mar 2003.

<sup>74</sup> Echevarria, 4.

<sup>75</sup> JFCOM RDO White Paper, V 2.0, vi.

two of the RDO concept occurs if deterrence fails and it is only during this phase that the US military should use force to *rapidly* and *decisively* coerce, compel or defeat the enemy to accomplish objectives.<sup>76</sup>

The concept's description of the interrelated phases makes application of the RDO concept across the spectrum of conflict suspect. During phase one of a rapid decisive operation, the authors suggest that the US may deploy forces to a theater as a flexible deterrent option (FDO).<sup>77</sup> Indeed, a rapid or even gradual deployment of large numbers of joint forces into an area as a FDO is a course of action operational level planners must often consider. In "The Stages and Spectrum of Conflict" section of his monograph, Colonel David Jablonsky, a Strategic Studies Institute contributing author to the book, *The Operational Art of Warfare Across the Spectrum of Conflict*, states,

The operational commander cannot neglect the so-called "pre-conflict stage" for mid to high intensity hostilities...In terms of deterrence, it is his evaluation that will count heavily as to whether a measure such as deployment of dual based forces might not actually trigger the hostilities it is designed to prevent.<sup>78</sup>

However, what makes the RDO concept difficult to understand is its claim that the first phase is of "an indeterminate length of time and has as its overall objective maintaining US national interests."<sup>79</sup> Specifically, the concept's acceptance of "an indeterminate length of time" during phase one ironically competes with its assertion that a RDO is both absolutely and relatively

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 9, 16. In a section entitled "Applying Rapid Decisive Operations," JFCOM authors clearly state "preparation to execute an RDO begins well before current-day crisis action planning." This point coupled with the white paper's emphasis on phase two, or hostilities suggests that a RDO is singularly focused on combat operations.

<sup>78</sup> COL David Jablonsky, "Strategy and the Operational Level of War" in *The Operational Art of Warfare Across the Spectrum of Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1987), 19.

<sup>79</sup> JFCOM RDO White Paper, V 2.0, 9

rapid.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, according to JFCOM, phase two of a RDO is to be accomplished “without a lengthy campaign or an extensive force build up;” yet an extensive force build up is often a requirement either as a FDO or as a necessary condition prior to commencing hostilities on terms favorable to the US.<sup>81</sup> These contradictory thoughts make the suggestion that RDO is applicable across the full spectrum of operations questionable, more so since the concept clearly emphasizes that the rapid decisive part of an operation only occurs during the second phase.

JFCOM’s descriptions also suggest that a successful deterrence operation cannot be decisive. What if the political aim is to avoid conflict through deterrence? In his monograph, “Toward a Revolution in Civil-Military Affairs -- Understanding the United States Military in the Post Cold War World,” Dr. William Gregor, Associate Professor of Political Science at the School of Advanced Military Studies, argued that “FDO’s are tangible evidence that the military, as an instrument of US security policy, can be used to achieve limited strategic aims.”<sup>82</sup> To illustrate, Gregor examined the Quemoy-Matsu crisis of 1954. In 1954 the Peoples Liberation Army of China began shelling Quemoy, an island off the Chinese coast but under control of the Nationalist government. Gregor pointed out that during this crisis the US response was limited for a couple of reasons. First, a conventional defense of Quemoy was not feasible; second, the US wished to avoid escalation to a nuclear war. Consequently, only limited forces under the command of the Seventh Fleet were sent to deter aggression because “the United States government knew only what it wanted to avoid.”<sup>83</sup> In the end, a large scale war between the US

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>82</sup> William J. Gregor, “Toward a Revolution in Civil-Military Affairs--Understanding the United States Military in the Post Cold War World,” *Project on U.S. Post Cold-War Civil-Military Relations, Working Paper No 6* (Cambridge, MA: John M. Olin Institute, August 1996), 31.

<sup>83</sup> Gregor, 33.



and China was avoided. Was not the prevention of a large war between the US and China, given the United States' aim, decisive?

Similarly, the RDO concept's stated aim to "rapidly collapse enemy war-making and warfighting capabilities, achieving a decisive outcome sooner" coupled with its goal to "deny the adversary the opportunity to achieve his objectives" can lead to confusion in understanding how to apply the RDO across the spectrum of conflict.<sup>84</sup> These two statements in the RDO Whitepaper suggest that total defeat of an adversary is the only desired effect or outcome intended when the RDO concept is applied. Again, for full spectrum operations, as the Quemoy–Matsu example illustrated, the political aim may be to avoid decisive conflict. FDO's are indeed evidence that "the use of military force when the United States is not at war is [must] be part of the unified commander's planning."<sup>85</sup> In the example provided, shouldn't an operation be deemed decisive if conflict is avoided in accordance with the political aim even though the adversary retains its capability to fight?

If deterrence fails and the US elects to fight, but application of the RDO concept falls short of completely destroying an adversary's capabilities, can the operation still be considered decisive? Some wars do not have a clear-cut ending. Historian Fred Ikle pointed out in his book *Every war Must End*, "as the costs of the war mount, people become less willing to incur future sacrifices merely to justify past ones."<sup>86</sup> In these situations, the opposing parties must choose "to prolong the fighting in hope of securing a lasting peace, or accept a less [decisive] settlement so as to end the war quickly."<sup>87</sup> Thus when an adversary's objective is to surrender prior to his

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<sup>84</sup> JFCOM RDO White Paper, V 2.0, 10.

<sup>85</sup> Gregor, 31.

<sup>86</sup> Fred Charles Ikle, *Every War Must End* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1971), 12.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 12.

complete destruction and sue for peace with limited gains, is the US operation decisive? Again, the Whitepaper does not clearly show how the RDO concept can be effectively applied across the full of spectrum operations that it claims to support.

Finally, JFCOM's assertion that executing an RDO is possible only when the military conditions are set for US forces to prosecute rapid, multidimensional attacks also can create tension for operational level planners.<sup>88</sup> The Whitepaper states, "a rapid decisive operation is continuous, and unrelenting. It begins under the conditions determined by the United States."<sup>89</sup> This statement is problematic for two reasons. First, it implies that an RDO is strictly an offensively oriented concept; as such, it is not a guide for full spectrum operations. Second, it suggests that future enemy's will not have a have valid vote in how future wars are fought.

It can be argued that the 1991 Gulf War, Operation Allied Force, and portions of Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated that enemy ground forces are currently no match for the US military when they are concentrated to fight in the open. As a result, future enemies now have enormous incentive to disperse and to position themselves in so called complex terrain, such as mountains, jungles or urban environments in order to dilute our technological advantage, exploit our aversion to manpower intensive operations, and prolong the fighting.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, in future contingencies, the US may find itself operating in areas where no major basing structure exists or where an enemy takes more effort to deny the build up of US forces. Setting

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<sup>88</sup> JFCOM RDO White Paper, V 2.0, 16. The RDO Whitepaper specifically states that a RDO "begins under conditions determined by the United States and its coalition partners." Unfortunately, it does not specify what these conditions are. Consequently, two points are derived. First, RDO is achievable when US forces are ready to fight in the manner prescribed. Second, RDO is only about fighting. How then is it applicable across the full spectrum of conflict.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>90</sup> Steven Kosiak and Andrew Krepinevich and Michael Vickers, *A Strategy for a Long Peace* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, January 2001), 7.

conditions to fight on US terms may take a long time, and the fighting itself may be prolonged due to the nature of the environment the US fights in.

These points about access denial and warfare in complex terrain are especially noteworthy in light of US preparations for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Specifically, the use of term "extensive build up" creates tension. First, in order to set conditions for the US strike into Iraq, the US deployed over 300,000 personnel and tons of equipment and supplies, an extensive build up, over a period of several months. During this build up phase, access to bases in Turkey was denied. At the point of this writing, there is no evidence of direct efforts to deny US access to ports in Kuwait. In the base plan, the US concept of operations for Operation Iraqi Freedom did not envision the immediate employment of troops across the Iraqi border upon their arrival into Kuwait. However, it is conceivable that at any point during the US force build up phase in the Middle East, hostilities between Iraqi and US forces could have erupted when the US had not fully set conditions for to strike rapidly and decisively. These points contradict RDO's assertion that an extensive force build up is no longer required because a force build up in the Middle East was essential to execute all phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom on US terms.<sup>91</sup>

Second, in some of the initial news reports Operation Iraqi Freedom had been declared a success and had validated the RDO concept.<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, others were not so quick to draw the same conclusions about the viability of the RDO concept. As David Mullohand, analyst for Jane's Defence Weekly pointed out, "it does help to fight a totally incompetent

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<sup>91</sup> Vince Crawley, "Less is More," *Army Times* (21 April 2003), 18. Crawley interviewed GEN Myers, CJCS, regarding Operation Iraqi Freedom for this article. According to GEN Myers, "Army Gen. Tommy Franks....wanted to achieve surprise even though he was in midst of a large military build up centered in Kuwait." Yet, Myers supports the RDO concept that argues for fewer forces fighting at greater speeds. In the fighting phase of an operation, this can work; on the other hand, more thought must be given to post conflict activities, arguably the most decisive part of an operation or campaign. In this case speed may not mean more, more (troops) mean more. According to Myers, "it's hard to imagine that you're going to need more in country than it took to defeat the Iraqi forces."

<sup>92</sup>Toby Harnden, "Fight Light, Fight Fast Theory Advances," *London Daily Post*, 14 April 2003, 1-2, (on-line): available from <http://ebird.dtic.mil/Apr2003/s200030415176138.html>, internet; accessed 16 April 2003.

enemy.”<sup>93</sup> Throughout Operation Iraqi Freedom, the potential existed for Iraqi forces to threaten the rapid execution of US offensive operations. The fact that the enemy did not fight more aggressively is not sufficient evidence that the concept is sound. Specifically, the Iraqis did not coordinate well their defense of Baghdad. They did not force the US into a traditionally bloody house to house fight. Nor did the Iraqis blow up bridges or dams, all of which are common tactics in defensive operations. As Loren Thompson pointed out, “[an RDO-like] campaign will work real well if [the US] fights another corrupt dictator with no air force, but if [the US] faces a technologically proficient adversary, [it will] be real sorry [it] took some of these chances.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, how does the RDO concept fit when the US politicians elect to fight an adversary and the conditions are not necessarily favorable according to the US military?

Another basis for questioning the RDO concept’s merit is its emphasis on simultaneity. The RDO concept authors claim information age networking capabilities will allow US forces “to compress and change the nature of the sequential, echeloned way [US forces] *plan* and *conduct* operations today.”<sup>95</sup> In an interview, Dave Ozolek, senior engineer advisor within the Joint Experimentation Directorate (JFCOM), echoed this trust in the enabling qualities of technologies to support the RDO concept. Ozolek noted the RDO concept “marks a sea change in joint operations.”<sup>96</sup> For example, “so instead of moving into an area and building up, as US

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<sup>93</sup> David Mulholland, “Luck or Good Judgement?” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 16 April 2003, (on-line): available from <http://ebird.dtic.mil/Apr2003/s200030415176138.html>, internet; accessed 16 April 2003. Similar analysis can be found in Richard Whittle’s article “Against All Predictions, U.S. Hasn’t Faced All-Out Battle,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 15 April 2003, (on-line): available from <http://ebird.dtic.mil/Apr2003/s200030415176352.html>, internet; accessed 16 April 2003. In his article, Whittle quotes Mark Burgess, a military analyst for the Center of Defense Information. Burgess states, among other points, “I would have expected [the Iraqis] to put up at least more of a fight in the cities.” In the same article, military analyst Loren Thompson of the Lexington Institute was quoted. Thompson stated, “The failure of the Iraqis to exploit any of their advantages is kind of inexplicable.”

<sup>94</sup> Harnden, 2.

<sup>95</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V2.0, viii.

<sup>96</sup> Jim Garamone, “Joint Forces Command to Test Revolutionary Combat Concept,” *Defense Aerospace.com*, 8 May 2000, 1.

forces did during Desert Shield, they would move directly to the application of decisive effects against the enemy.”<sup>97</sup>

Ozolek’s claims regarding RDO seem more faith-based than reality-based. Is Ozolek’s statement credible given our witness to the physical and political challenges that affected the basing of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and attack aircraft in Turkey in support of the 2003 war with Iraq? For the anticipated US invasion of Iraq, a concept of military operations preferable to the US was dependent upon initiating air and ground strikes against Iraqi forces from multiple directions. Specifically, the US desired to strike Iraq simultaneously from both Kuwait in the South and from Turkey in the Northwest. Attacking from multiple directions simultaneously offered US forces some potential operational advantages; one advantage was forcing the Iraqis to spread their forces more thinly against two fronts. The operational aim, conceptually, was to accelerate the rate that attacking US ground and forces would destroy Iraqi forces; it was to make the offensive more rapid. In doing so, the expectation was that the US would consume fewer resources and lose fewer soldiers during the fight. Unfortunately, on the brink of war, US diplomatic efforts had yet to secure bases of operation in Turkey for US forces. Elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, one of the US Army’s most technically equipped mechanized units, remained afloat on transport ships in the Mediterranean Sea. Given the timing of the decision to fight, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was prevented from entering Iraq as an invasion force from Turkey, causing the fight to possibly be less rapid than planned.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Garamone, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Associated Press, “4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Arriving at Kuwaiti Port,” *Kansas City Star*, 2 April 2003, A9. For clarification, the author had access to the origins of the original concept of the operations for the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. This article clearly illustrated some of the real challenges to the soundness of the RDO construct that requires “assured access as an operational enabler (See page A-22 of the JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V2.0). First, the outcome of failed diplomacy to secure basing rights for the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Turkey impacted the operational plan. “Ships that had been waiting for weeks in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, sailed for 10 days, passing through the Suez Canal to bring cargo that had been loaded as long as two months.” Second, real physical challenges to the deployment support an argument against Ozolek’s assertions. “Thirty ships carrying some of the worlds’ most sophisticated

Again, this is not an argument against developing concepts that account for technological improvements in support of communication, transportation and weaponry functions to gain efficiencies in the prosecution of warfare. This is certainly sensible, given the costs of armed conflict. Furthermore, a concept built to employ decisive force rapidly is indeed consistent with the recent American approach to warfare characterized by a reliance on technology solutions, and a general desire to minimize all casualties and collateral damage. On the other hand, the RDO concept architects' suggestion that technological revolution capabilities will empower the US to achieve full spectrum operational objectives rapidly and decisively remains suspect because, as noted, several white-paper contradictions contribute to creating an incoherent RDO definition and obfuscate its meaning.

#### **Understanding What is Expected – Part I –What is Decisive?**

Clearly the RDO concept assumes that application of technologically enhanced forces have a high probability of success achieving decisive victory. What appears to challenge understanding of the RDO concept most is its strict focus on the adjectival modifier “decisive.” According to the RDO concept decisive equals “imposing our will on the enemy by breaking his coherence and defeating his *will and ability* to fight.”<sup>99</sup> Webster’s Dictionary defines decisive as “conclusive, resolute, and beyond doubt.”<sup>100</sup> However, historical experience provides numerous examples of conflicts that have ended with less conclusive results. For example, Saddam Hussein, his regime leadership, and Iraqi military forces, at the point that writing this

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military hardware will arrive in the coming days, *but it won't face immediate battle. The port can handle only five ships at a time, and each ship takes two to three days to unload. Helicopters have to be reassembled, and weapons need to be tested before being certified as combat ready*”(emphasis added). According to Brigadier General Stephen Speaks, “[the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division] could be on the battlefield in a matter of weeks.” Fortunately for BG Speakes, the port was sufficiently secure to allow the off load of his units.

<sup>99</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V2.0, 11.

<sup>100</sup> Anne H. Soukhanov, *Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1984), 353.

monograph began, continued to pose a threat to US interests twelve years after cessation of the 1991 Gulf War hostilities – the Iraqi leader still maintained both the will and ability to fight. Even as the end of Saddam Hussein's regime appears to be a foregone conclusion, the potential for groups of Saddam loyalists continue to threaten the stability of Iraq. Looting, and guerrilla and terrorist like operations against coalition forces or the members of the Iraqi population are expected to occur for some time following the fall of Saddam contributing to sort of a victory without peace – decisive or indecisive?<sup>101</sup>

Observation of US operations in Afghanistan does not seem to help to clarify how the RDO concept works. As late April 2003, Osama Bin Laden appears to be still at large attempting to coordinate terrorist attacks against US citizens. Even if Bin Laden is dead, BG Randy Mixon, Director of the Joint Staff, CJTF 180 in Afghanistan, estimated conventional and special operations combat operations to defeat remaining Al Qaeda and Taliban forces will continue through the year 2004. Therefore, are US led coalition operations in Afghanistan considered to be rapid? Is destruction of the last Al Qaeda operative required for the operations to be deemed decisive?<sup>102</sup> If so, it will not be a rapid operation.

To be of value to operational planners, the RDO concept must first clearly define what is meant by “decisive victory?” Secondly, the RDO concept must address how do operational

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<sup>101</sup> Richard Whittle and David McLemore, “When Will Victory Be Achieved? Answer Isn't Easy to Come By” *Dallas Morning News*, 6 April 2003, (on-line): available from <http://ebird.dtic.mil/Apr2003/s20030406172639.html>. It is also indicated, but not confirmed that Muslim extremists, potentially terrorists, entered Iraq from surrounding states threatening the security of US forces as well as the stability of post-Saddam Iraq. See Timothy J. Burger and Douglas Waller, “After Troops, Terror,” *Time*, 14 April 2003, (on-line): available from <http://ebird.dtic.mil/Apr2003/e20030407172963.html>.

<sup>102</sup> BG Randy Mixon, In email dialogue, 10 Feb 03. According to Mixon, “we are setting the conditions to go to what we call Phase IV reconstruction. We will continue to search out and destroy the enemy (you may have heard of the recent operation in Spin Boldak) but are forming teams to focus on reconstruction, working with IOs and NGOs and the local Afghan government. An important part of this campaign is the training of the AFGHAN National Army. We have trained 6 battalions to date and have begun low scale operations putting them with SF units. Key elements of the campaign focus on the adoption of the constitution in the Fall 2003 and the next election/selection of a permanent government in June 04. June 04 is the time we believe the Afghan Army will be able to take over more

planners guarantee achievement of decisive victory rapidly? Continued development of the RDO concept must not resist evaluation of insights that recent US military experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Somalia or other areas have to offer. History is the primary means by which we study and understand warfare.”<sup>103</sup> “A good future operating concept should reflect an awareness of military history, even though it may propose a revolutionary departure from historical patterns.”<sup>104</sup> “An appreciation of history will provide a natural skepticism of faddish ideas that have not had to stand the test of time.”<sup>105</sup>

At quick glance, there are three questions operational planners may derive from trying to understand the RDO concept’s definition of rapid and decisive. First, how much of an opponent’s ability to fight must be defeated in order to break his will to fight? Second, for how long must an opponent’s spirit to fight be broken before an operation is deemed decisive? Third, if an opponent retains an “ability to fight” is the operation considered conclusive? The RDO concept does not address these questions; consequently, understanding what is decisive remains problematic.

### **Defining Decisive Victory**

Examination of several sources contributes to a varied understanding of what is meant by the term “decisive.” In *Quest for Decisive Victory*, historian Robert M. Citino argued that by restoring pursuit to rightful place in combat through integration of new technologies, tanks, radios, and aircraft into massed formations, the WWII Germans “resurrected the possibility of

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responsibility. Anyway not to bore you but it is a long process and US Military definitely will be here till June 04 and beyond.”

<sup>103</sup> Schmitt, 12. In the DART working paper, Schmitt emphasizes that one foundation for a good future operational concept is historical awareness. He states, “A concept that ignores history risks sacrificing credibility.”

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 13.



decisive warfare on the operational level.”<sup>106</sup> Citino stressed that increased mobility and lethality of tank and motorized infantry forces molded into combined arms Panzer units enabled rapid pursuit of a tactically defeated opponent into the depth of his battle-space and turned victorious battles into a victorious campaign. “In modern terms, the pursuit is the link between warfare at the level of tactics (the technique of winning a battle) and the level of operations (the art of winning a military campaign)... When one reads accounts of a decisive victory, one is usually reading about a successful pursuit.”<sup>107</sup> Citino’s historical analysis seemed to equate operational decisiveness with the complete physical destruction of an opponent’s military capabilities. The German exploitation of many developments including air power, armor forces, and training and doctrine contributed to “the flexible nature of German operational planning, [the Germans] could change its overall form as circumstances dictated without losing sight of the main aim of battle -- destruction of the enemy field force.”<sup>108</sup> Is Citino’s position that destruction of the enemy’s field forces equates to decisive victory the intended meaning of RDO’s reference to “defeating an opponent’s ability to fight?”<sup>109</sup> Again, if an enemy chooses to surrender yet maintains capability to fight, is the operation deemed decisive? What if an enemy has no current capacity, but refuses to yield?

Theorist Carl Von Clausewitz declared that the ‘object of war is to impose our will on the enemy’ and to secure that object, the true aim of warfare “is to render the enemy powerless

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<sup>106</sup> Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 2002), xv.

<sup>107</sup> Citino, xii-xiii.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 282.

<sup>109</sup> Per this monograph’s earlier discussion, descriptions of the phases of the RDO concept seem to suggest that a RDO is only executable when physical violence occurs during phase two. In this case, the destruction of an opponent’s capability to fight could be considered decisive. On the other hand, the concept authors assert the concept is applicable across the spectrum of operations. In peacekeeping operations, both sides generally maintain capacity and the will to fight but do not; thus, the question raised is how do operational level planners apply the RDO concept in these situations. What is decisive?

through use of force.”<sup>110</sup> Taken to theoretical extremes, interacting warring parties will use all available force to exert their influence and “there is no logical limit to the application of that force.” The side with quantifiably greater force and stronger will should prevail – decisively. Clausewitz further describes three conditions that war, in practice, would move in this decisive direction:

[First,] war must be a wholly isolated act, occurring suddenly and not produced by previous events in the political world. [Second, war must consist] of a single decisive act or a set of simultaneous ones. [Third, the] decision [to be] achieved was perfect in itself, uninfluenced by any previous estimate of the political situation it would bring about.<sup>111</sup>

But, Clausewitz cautions, in reality war is never a single isolated act. Furthermore, the nature of war often impedes the simultaneous concentration of all forces and human nature turns leaders away from exerting maximum effort to achieve first decision.<sup>112</sup> Assuming conditions of will and force were set to achieve decisive victory, elements of chance, fog and friction can dictate other outcomes. Finally, a strategic decision for war cannot be perfect in itself. Estimates of the political situation that drives a decision for war, by definition, are not absolute or perfect. One factor, for example, is that a decision for war is heavily influenced by international and domestic political considerations. Often, the political objectives are not clear.

Historian Joseph F. Bouchard, in his book *Command in Crisis*, notes, “one of the fundamental problems in international relations is to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for war to occur.”<sup>113</sup> Bouchard’s long list of factors affecting the interaction of

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<sup>110</sup> Clausewitz, 75, 77.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 78 -80.

<sup>113</sup> John F. Bouchard, *Command In Crisis* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), xi. Bouchard’s long list of factors affecting the interaction of strategic decision makers on both sides of a crisis is sufficient to illustrate why decisions for war cannot be perfect. Factors include: “structure of the international system, history, culture,

strategic decision-makers on both sides of a crisis is sufficient to illustrate why decisions for war cannot be perfect. Factors include the “structure of the international system, history, culture, economic development of resources, ideology, geography, and military technology.”<sup>114</sup> It is impossible to predict with certainty, using these factors or combinations thereof, when conflict will occur. Bouchard’s research further shows that war or conflict is often the unintended result of activities designed and implemented to prevent escalation to war; thus he states, “there is an inherent element of randomness and unpredictability in the occurrence of war that...theories cannot eliminate or define out of existence.”<sup>115</sup> These factors affecting the political estimates that predict when a war will occur, reciprocally contribute to predict when a war will end; however, neither estimate can be definite; therefore an absolute “perfect” decision is unachievable.

Reflecting on the Vietnam War can help to illustrate. During the Vietnam conflict a lack of clearly defined US political objectives prevented development of a “perfect” and coherent grand strategic military design. According to General Bruce Palmer Jr, in his book, *The 25 – Year War, America’s Military Role in Vietnam*, many senior military leaders felt they were operating “in a strategic vacuum without a firm feeling for what the ultimate requirement might be.”<sup>116</sup> This lack of strategic focus consigned US military to “a protracted struggle of attrition at the operational level.”<sup>117</sup> Although the US military possessed a dominant technological edge relative to the North Vietnamese, it was unable to achieve favorable military conditions to

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economic development of resources, ideology, geography, and military technology.” Bouchard’s research further shows that war or conflict is often the unintended result of activities designed and implemented to prevent escalation; thus he states, “there is an inherent element of randomness and unpredictability in the occurrence of war that...theories cannot eliminate or define out of existence.”

<sup>114</sup> Bouchard, x.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>116</sup> LTG Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25 – Year War, America’s Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 45.

<sup>117</sup> Jablonsky, 7.

support unclear political aims. Consequently, ambiguous political estimates during the Vietnam War, often shaped by domestic pressures, eventually contributed to a withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam before a strategic decision favorable to US interests was achieved. Thus, they contribute to supporting the argument that real war tends toward achievement of something less than decisive results. As Clausewitz clearly stated, "in war the result is never final ... the defeated [party] often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date."<sup>118</sup> Hence, what is the theoretical basis for the US military's championing of the RDO concept? Again, what is meant by decisive?

Dr. Colin Gray, Professor of International Politics Strategic Studies at University of Reading, England and noted author, offered an alternative viewpoint that can help to illuminate what the RDO concept authors may have intended with their use of the term "decisive." In his monograph, "Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory," Gray's historical exploration of the relevance of the idea of decisive victory is potentially useful as a foundation for RDO concept development. Gray concluded that "decisive victory" has political, strategic and operational meaning. At the operational level, decisive victory decides the outcome of a campaign, though not necessarily the war as a whole. Strategically, decisive victory is decided by who wins the war militarily. While possible, a single act or a set of simultaneous acts of force may not result in strategic victory. Finally, decisive political victory achieves a favorable post war settlement.<sup>119</sup>

Gray acknowledged that the idea of decisive victory should not be equated necessarily with the complete military destruction of the enemy. At the operational level "all that [decisive

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<sup>118</sup> Clausewitz, 80.

<sup>119</sup> Gray, 11.

victory] requires is sufficiency of military success to enable achievement of... the war's political object."<sup>120</sup> Colonel David Jablonsky, contributing author to the Strategic Studies Institute monograph, "The Operational Art Of War Across the Spectrum of Conflict," similarly acknowledged that operational level military conditions need not result in the absolute conquest of an enemy's capabilities. Rather, Jablonsky argued, the "operational commander must conceptualize a military condition or conditions that will ultimately achieve the strategic goals in order to be successful."<sup>121</sup> This requires the operational commander to focus on

broad but decisive objectives extended over time and space beyond the tactical realm. These objectives range anywhere from destruction of committed forces or reserves to co-option of allies to even more abstract concepts such as endurance of public support.<sup>122</sup>

Both Gray's and Jablonsky's conclusions, although founded upon Clausewitzian perspectives, are not anachronistic. Each author investigated and accounted for the impacts of modern technologies on the nature of warfare. Both recognized that today's US military forces possess the mobility, firepower and communications that can more easily enable the conversion of tactical victories into operational and strategic successes or failures. If decisive victory is the RDO concept authors' intention for full spectrum operations, "the importance of interpreting strategic guidance cannot be overstated in an era in which technology has and is transforming the scope and tempo of the operational art."<sup>123</sup> This point is noteworthy because effective and efficient use of technologies to share knowledge is indeed central to the RDO concept.

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<sup>120</sup> Gray, 12-13.

<sup>121</sup> Jablonsky, 13.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 23.

Today's operational level commanders and planners must clearly recognize that there are varied degrees of decisiveness that are likely to prove acceptable at the operational level of war. "Whether or not the decision sought is to be [militarily] conclusive...is a matter initially for political leaders to decide."<sup>124</sup> In counter-terrorism efforts for example, the fleeting nature of the target, the criticality of time, coupled with enhanced communications between strategic authorities and tactical executors potentially reduces room for but does not eliminate traditional operational level considerations. A reasonable question to ask is what constitutes decisive victory over Al-Qaeda, let alone terrorism in general? If absolute destruction of individual terrorists is required, then the decision is not likely to be achieved rapidly.<sup>125</sup> Conversely, planners may determine measures of success that are politically acceptable, militarily feasible, and rapidly attainable, but are less absolute than total destruction of a terrorist organization. Thus, "decisive victory is possible against terrorists, but it is not the kind of victory that can be practiced in the California desert."<sup>126</sup>

Gray's analysis of the idea of "decisive victory" facilitates understanding of the RDO concept's intent. A decisive victory is not absolute or beyond doubt, but it is achievable. In each operation or campaign, what constitutes decisiveness will be unique to that case.

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<sup>124</sup> Gray, 32.

<sup>125</sup> The author recently served on a US Special Operations Command planning group during November 2002. The focus of the group was to develop a campaign to defeat terrorist organizations that threaten US citizens, its sovereignty and its interests. It is estimated that the time required to execute this campaign will extend beyond thirty years.

<sup>126</sup> Gray, 20. Gray's reference to the California desert refers to tactical training of conventional US Army forces at the National Training Center (NTC) at Ft Irwin, California. At NTC, brigade size task forces frequently compete in mock battles against a mechanized conventional force of similar size. Tactical tasks frequently trained on include attack to destroy or defend to destroy the opposing enemy force. Contemporary doctrine encourages commanders to quantify how much of an opposing force must be destroyed to achieve the decisive result of "destruction." For example, in artillery jargon, "destruction" of a force equates to reducing his weapons capability by 30%. Time factors are necessary to help define destruction in tactical terms. At the NTC, these time standards are often measured in hours and days. In short, it is relatively easy to determine criteria to measure decisive results during the singular tactical battles at the NTC. Applying these same criteria to determine victory against in support of a global counter-terrorist campaign would likely achieve something less than decisive victory.

Furthermore, as the strategic goals change, and they often do, the operational commander, in order to be decisive, must accordingly adapt the military conditions to meet the new strategic aims. Across the spectrum of conflict with potentially varied objectives, operational planners must clearly recognize that a "one size military style" will not fit all cases. Regardless of how well equipped and networked US forces may be; different enemies in different wars will require application of different military means and methods.<sup>127</sup> For operational planners, the bottom line is having a clear understanding of what is expected.

Attainment of decisive victory then is determined to be possible. However, while US political leaders may desire it, decisive victory is never guaranteed. For US forces that are engaged across the continuum of conflict, the first challenge to defining what constitutes decisive victory must include an understanding of the nature of the war. In guerilla warfare for example, Mao Tse-tung stated, "there is no such thing as a decisive battle."<sup>128</sup> Yet, historian Bernard Shaw pointed out in his book, *Street Without Joy*, "guerilla forces are not invincible."<sup>129</sup> The point made is simply that military leaders must tailor the metrics of success to align with the character of the war they are fighting. In the end, only political leaders can decide on what is strategically decisive. For the remainder of this monograph, this study will examine how can technologically enhanced joint forces guarantee decisive victory rapidly.

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<sup>127</sup> Gray, 19-20.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>129</sup> Bernard Shaw, *Street Without Joy* (New York, NY: Schocken Books Inc., 1963), 373. Reference to guerrilla warfare is especially relevant in this paper in light of discussions concerning recent observation of Iraqi tactics during the initial days of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As of April 6 2003, several military analysts have commented on guerrilla like tactics. Others have suggested, that the potential for an Iraqi "guerilla campaign" could develop post the seizure of Baghdad and regime change. The aim of this guerrilla effort would be to discredit the US forces over a protracted period. On page 377 of his book, Bernard Shaw's quote of Marshal Tran Hung Dao could be telling, "The enemy must fight his battles far from his home base for a long time... We must further weaken him by drawing him into protracted campaigns. Once his initial dash is broken, it will be easier to destroy him." Perhaps the result of Operation Iraqi Freedom, will be sort of rapid victory without peace. Is this the political decision desired?

## Understanding What is Expected - Part II -- How Rapid is Rapid?

For Bush, victory [in Iraq] requires a short war...I'd guess that if it goes beyond three weeks, Bush will be in real trouble.<sup>130</sup>

Throughout the RDO Whitepaper, JFCOM presents ideas that are difficult to deal with. JFCOM's assertion that "rapid [equals] accomplishing the objectives of the campaign with speed and timing that is superior, *absolutely* and *relatively*, to the speed of the enemy" is a case in point.<sup>131</sup> Emphasis on the modifier "absolutely rapid" creates an additional hurdle for operational level leaders to understand what is expected of them. For operational planners, an absolute duration component is problematic because it causes expectations that operations will occur exactly on schedule. This absolutism regarding speed of operations assumes US planners are completely certain of the situation in which they will operate. To date, no technology can guarantee this certainty. Recent reports regarding US activity in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom help to illustrate.

Prior to execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom, it was predicted that the technologically dominant US and coalition forces would have easily sliced through Iraqi resistance and rapidly forced an Iraqi regime change. According to one official, "the war would last no longer than three weeks, and possibly less than that."<sup>132</sup> Unfortunately for US and coalition forces, Iraqi troops and militias use of ruses, ambushes and other guerrilla tactics exploited the risks inherent

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<sup>130</sup> Andrew Bacevich, as quoted by Thomas E. Ricks in "Duration of War Key to U.S. Victory," *Washington Post*, 19 March 2003 (on-line); available from <http://ebird.dtic.mil/Mar2003/e20030319163945.html>; accessed 19 March 2003. Andrew Bacevich is a retired US Army colonel and currently teaches at Boston University. In this same article, retired Army Colonel, Joe Adamczyk notes the influence of American public opinion on defining victory. "A key milestone for the American public may come in five weeks, when the war, if it is still underway, will have lasted longer than the 1991 Persian Gulf War. At that point, said retired Army Col. Joe Adamczyk, a career infantry officer, Americans may start asking, 'Why isn't this one as easy as the first one?' Is speed in warfare decisive?"

<sup>131</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V 2.0, 10.

<sup>132</sup> Warren P. Strobel, "War Dissent Not Fully Communicated to Bush," *Kansas City Star*, 29 Mar 2003, A-15. Strobel quoted Richard Perle, an influential former Pentagon official who is close to Rumsfeld.



its fast paced concept of operations.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, adverse weather added to the delay of US ground operations aimed at getting to Baghdad on planned schedule. Perhaps LTG William Wallace, Commander 5<sup>th</sup> Corps and senior US ground commander for Operation Iraqi Freedom said it best, “the enemy [we were] fighting against [was] different from the one we’d war-gamed against.”<sup>134</sup> As Robert Dorff, Director of National Security Strategy at The US Army War College, noted, “expectations were raised for something that might be quick and relatively painless. What we [saw] in the first few days of [Operation Iraqi Freedom] probably ought to have dispel[ed] that.”<sup>135</sup> When compared to the Iraqi military, the US and coalitions forces clearly had a technological advantage; yet the expectations of an *absolutely* rapid operation in Iraq were not, at least at the point of this writing, completely satisfied.

A second hurdle to understanding what JFCOM authors mean by rapid concerns their use of the term “campaign” versus “operation” in the concept’s definition of rapid. In this case the substitution of the term “operation” with the term “campaign” suggests a degree of interchangeability that potentially obscures the concept’s meaning of rapid. Use of the term campaign in this sense seems to contradict the concept’s reference to *absolutely rapid*. Both operations and campaigns aim to support achievement of strategic objectives; however, an operation is generally recognized as a singular event composed of battles whereas a campaign is comprised of multiple operations, normally linked sequentially and generally taking more time. In current doctrine, a campaign “is required whenever pursuit of a strategic objective is not attainable through a single major operation.”<sup>136</sup> Operational level planners often phase multiple

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<sup>133</sup> Strobel, A-15.

<sup>134</sup> Rick Atkinson, “Army General Says War is Off Schedule,” *Kansas City Star*, 28 Mar 2003, 1.

<sup>135</sup> Joseph L. Galloway, “Rumsfeld War Plan at Issue,” *Kansas City Star*, 25 Mar 2003, A7.

<sup>136</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 5-00.1, Joint Doctrine for Campaign Planning* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 16 April 2001), II-19.

operations in order to enable joint forces to achieved objectives. In initial phases of a campaign, conducting operational movement of forces is critical and is frequently done during the pre-hostility phase. According to the RDO concept, this phase may be of an "indeterminate length;" thus by definition, it cannot be absolutely rapid.

A third hurdle to understanding what JFCOM meant by the terms rapid results from the concepts emphasis on simultaneity. This is because, generally speaking, sequential operations take more time than simultaneous operations. The RDO Whitepaper's statement that "the execution of RDO...does not follow the traditional sequential pattern of pre-hostilities, lodgment, decisive combat, stabilization, follow through, post-hostilities and redeployment" can create tension for operational planners.<sup>137</sup> All of these steps are what operational level planners plan. At the operational level, "the emphasis is not on a single battle; it is not even on battle itself."<sup>138</sup> While many of these steps can simultaneously overlap, they are generally executed in sequence.

Emphasis on simultaneity is not new. As early as 1930, Russian theorist, Alexander Tukhachevskiy, suggested that offensive operations occur along the entire width of the enemy's front and throughout the depth of main attack corridor. These actions would produce multiple effects throughout both physical and cybernetic domains. Multiple attacks occurring throughout

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<sup>137</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V 2.0, 18. In its chart, entitled "Changing the Conduct of Warfare and Conflict," the RDO concept's comparison between "Traditional" and "Future" warfare makes the distinction that sequential and segmented operations characterize traditional warfare whereas, simultaneous, distributed, and parallel operations reflect the future conduct of warfare. RDO authors claim on page 18, "We are attempting to create a transformed joint force that will be fully capable of applying all of the characteristics of future operations." Similarly the concept's comments on page 17, "the execution of RDO...does not follow the traditional sequential pattern of pre-hostilities, lodgment, decisive combat, stabilization, follow through, post hostilities and redeployment." These characterizations of what RDO is or is not, or is going to be, adds to the difficulty in understanding what it really is. In one part, RDO is based on two sequential phases. The first phase includes actions taken prior to actual hostilities, including deploying forces. In other parts, such as just noted, the authors claim otherwise.

<sup>138</sup> GEN Glenn K Otis, ed Clayton R Newell and Michael D Krause, "The Commanders View" in *On Operational Art* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1994), 33.

the depth of an opponent's arrayed forces made the decision on where to send the reserves very uncertain and difficult. Tikhachevskiy further argued that executing special attacks simultaneously with the main attack would enable the rapid penetration of the offensive forces to operational depth. This penetration would result in a cascading deterioration of the enemy's will to resist; the loss of will to resist was the overall effect desired.<sup>139</sup>

In his book, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence –The Evolution of Operational Theory*, Shimon Naveh asserted that the idea of simultaneity can create a notion of “operational shock.” According to Naveh, operational shock results from engaging the front and rear of an adversary's warfighting system while at the same time synchronizing a concurrent operation all along the opponent' depth. The aim of operational shock is to rupture, physically and cognitively, an opponent's war-fighting system making it incoherent. In theory an incoherent military system inevitably will disintegrate and collapse under pressure.<sup>140</sup> In this sense, this notion of operational shock is very similar to the aim of the RDO concept.

Major Richard Dixon, Student of Operational Art at the School of Advanced Military Studies, examined theoretical ideas related to operational shock, simultaneity, and operational sequencing and compared these ideas to contemporary US doctrine. In his monograph, “Operational Sequencing: The Tension Between Simultaneous and Sequential Operations,” Dixon observed a growing US bias toward simultaneity.<sup>141</sup> Dixon also pointed out that

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<sup>139</sup> M.N. Tikhachevskiy, *New Problems in Warfare* (Moscow, 1931), in US Army Command and General Staff College, School of Advanced Military Studies Reprint, 1990. This brief synopsis was derived from Dixon's summary of the Tikhachevskiy ideas in his monograph. See MAJ Richard J. Dixon, “Operational Sequencing: The Tension Between Simultaneous and Sequential Operations,” (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 5 May 1994), 4-16

<sup>140</sup> Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence –The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 18-19.

<sup>141</sup> MAJ Richard J. Dixon, “Operational Sequencing: The Tension Between Simultaneous and Sequential Operations,” (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 5 May 1994), Abstract.

increasing the tempo of operations can indeed increase momentum and strike at the heart of time-competitive decision cycles. Making sound decisions faster than the enemy can increase the tempo of operations which can create advantages over an opponent by making it difficult for him to respond effectively to rapidly changing situations in a timely fashion. The goal is for the opponent's situation to progressively deteriorate to the point that he simply cannot react, or his actions are irrelevant.<sup>142</sup> According to Dixon, simultaneous actions contribute to "the most rapid tempo" of operations.<sup>143</sup> Thus, increasing the tempo of operations through use of information-age technology, as RDO desires to do, appears justified.

However, for operational planners, the RDO concept's bias towards simultaneity can create tension. Dixon reminds that for operational level planners one of the critical criteria for deciding upon simultaneous versus sequential operations depends upon the means available.<sup>144</sup> More succinctly, are simultaneous actions feasible? If the means available are not sufficient for simultaneous actions to achieve desired effects, then simultaneous operations are not feasible. In this case operational planners should consider sequential operations, which by comparison are less rapid than simultaneous actions.

Several factors can shape the constraints that determine how much force is available to execute operations, but the central issue to address concerns acceptable risk. One factor concerns the timing to begin the operation. According to Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, a chief advocate of the RDO concept, "there is always risk in gradualism. It pacifies the hesitant and the tentative. What is doesn't do is shock and awe and alter the calculations of

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<sup>142</sup> Dixon, 15.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 3.

the people you're dealing with."<sup>145</sup> Conversely, General Joseph P. Hoar, former Commander of US Central Command noted, for the United States, "the concept of risk in a military operation is not solely about winning and losing, it is also about the costs... measured in American lives."<sup>146</sup> Unfortunately, the RDO concept does not address what are acceptable risks to take when choosing to decide upon a rapid or gradual approach to operations. The RDO concept merely states "operations will focus on achieving what is required, when it is required, where it is required, and *for only long as it is required* to produce the desired effect... to achieve the strategic and operations objectives of the campaign."<sup>147</sup>

In some cases, operational commanders may determine that resources to conduct an operation rapidly are not feasible or to begin an operation before all forces are in place raises the level of risk to an unacceptable level. As journalist James Kitfield pointed out in his article about Operation Iraqi Freedom, "the Army's Gamble," there are real concerns for moving too swiftly. "The race to Baghdad is an audacious, risky, low-margin-for-error endeavor that throws out traditional Army doctrine and is sorely testing V Corps' troops, equipment, and logistical support."<sup>148</sup> According to LTC Rob Baker, Deputy G3, V Corps, the greatest risks are in "stretching [V Corps'] logistic lines over 500 kilometers through territory that may not be that secure once lead elements have passed."<sup>149</sup> Baker's concerns were vindicated; several logisticians supporting V Corps' maneuver lost their lives trailing along V Corps' unsecured route of advance -- was this an acceptable risk, or was this loss of life preventable?

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<sup>145</sup> Harnden, 1.

<sup>146</sup> Joseph P Hoar, GEN, USMC (Ret). "Why Aren't There Enough Troops in Iraq?" *New York Times*, (2 April 2003), (on line); available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/02/opinion/02HOAR.html>; accessed 6 April 2003.

<sup>147</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V2.0, 17.

<sup>148</sup> James Kitfield, "The Army's Gamble," *National Journal*, 29 March 2003, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Kitfield, 3.

In any case, the future success of applying the RDO concept, which clearly deems speed matters more than the size of the force, “depends upon how closely we think Saddam’s Iraq resembles our future enemies.”<sup>150</sup> For operational planners the real risk to achieving operational success in the future may be adherence to a singularly focused operational concept because of its perceived success during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Thus, rapidity in operations is not absolute, as RDO claims it can be; it is strictly a relative term. For any given operation, determining whether to conduct an operation rapidly requires acceptance of some degree of risk. The RDO concept’s failure to address or define acceptable risk while suggesting operations be *absolutely rapid* can create anxiety. For operational level planners, this anxiety challenges the US penchant for nominal if any casualties when fighting. Furthermore, as currently written, the RDO concept offers no metrics enabling operational planners to gauge if an operation is sufficiently rapid. Consequently, since the war in Iraq resulted in the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime in just over three weeks, but US forces, as of this writing have not totally located and eliminated the threat from Iraqi weapons of massed destruction, it may not be deemed decisive. Thus it could be declared it wasn’t rapid enough.

#### **Political-Military Tension –A Reality Check**

Military leaders must be willing to tell their superiors what they need to hear, not what they want to tell them or what the civilian leader would like to hear.<sup>151</sup>

Les Aspin, December 1993

Several political-military considerations can potentially frustrate attainment of military objectives in a rapid and decisive fashion. First, ambiguous political objectives can challenge

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<sup>150</sup> Harden, 1-2.

<sup>151</sup> Hoffman, 133. In his book, Hoffman quotes from Richard Haney’s article “Politics and the Military: Lincoln to Aspin,” *Washington Post*, 4 December 1993.

the implementation of a rapid and decisive operational concept. Second, the nature of the conflict can impede an absolutely rapid and decisive operation. Third, constraints can shape what is politically acceptable versus what is militarily preferred. The results often reflect disconnects between ends and means in war – operational friction.

It is generally accepted that the spectrum of war can be viewed from three different levels: strategic, operational, and tactical.<sup>152</sup> Others argue an additional perspective, the military-strategic level, exists.<sup>153</sup> On one end of the spectrum, strategy is concerned with the coordination of all elements of national power, to include diplomatic, economic, informational and military instruments to attain national goals – political objectives. Military strategy, subordinate to national strategy, consists of structuring and building forces as well as planning and conducting military tasks to secure strategic military objectives. On the other end, the tactical realm is the domain of the military and is narrower in scope. Tactical leaders use forces assigned to their disposal and fight them in order to accomplish specific military objectives. Between strategic and tactical perspectives lies the operational perspective, the pivotal link that bridges the other two. Ideally, all objectives along the spectrum of war are nested. Successful accomplishment of tactical level objectives supports attainment of operational aims and achievement of operational aims furthers strategic or political intentions.

Given the linkage of perspectives along the spectrum of war, it should be readily apparent that political objectives have a bearing on the military operational concepts developed to achieve them. In cases where commitment of military power is expected, political objectives are ideally unambiguous; clearly stated political objectives observe Clausewitz's judgment that no leader should go to war "without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war

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<sup>152</sup> Clayton Newell, *The Framework of Operational Warfare* (New York, NY: Chapman and Hall Inc., 1991), 13-35.

<sup>153</sup> Gregor, 16.

and how he intends to conduct it.”<sup>154</sup> In reality, political objectives are situation dependent and often within a situation, very dynamic. During the course of operations, international and domestic pressures can cause leaders to modify, add to or delete initial political objectives. When political objectives change, the military objectives should also shift, as “the military objective should be governed by the political objective.”<sup>155</sup> However, shifting objectives can create operational friction that can threaten the attainment of strategic goals in a rapid and decisive fashion. The rapidly shifting US political objectives during Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1993 illustrate this point.

As late as 1992, a collapsed state government, an ineffective United Nations (UN) mission, images of mass starvation coupled with evidence that armed factions and gangs were diverting international food aid to the victims of famine, generated pressure for US intervention in Somalia.<sup>156</sup> Therefore upon receipt of UN Security Resolution 794 in Dec 1992, which approved the use of “all necessary means to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia,” President George W. Bush directed the deployment of US troops to Africa.<sup>157</sup> Going in, the US military mission was humanitarian in nature; it “was [to be] limited and specific: to create security conditions which will permit the feeding of the starving Somali people and allow the transfer of this security function to the UN peacekeeping force.”<sup>158</sup> According to President Bush, the US did not intend to dictate political

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<sup>154</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 579.

<sup>155</sup> Liddell Hart, *Strategy – The Indirect Approach* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 351.

<sup>156</sup> Terrence Lyons and Ahmed I. Samatar, *Somalia* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 30 -34. Pursuant to UN Resolution 751, dated April 1992, the UN established UN Operation In Somalia (eventually labeled UNOSOM 1) which provided for a 500 member security force to escort humanitarian deliveries to the victims of famine and civil unrest. The force, composed of Pakistanis, “had neither weapons nor rules of engagement to take actions against local militia that challenged UN policy and stole the goods.

<sup>157</sup> Lyons, 34.



outcomes; rather, he stated, “our mission is humanitarian, but we will not tolerate armed gangs ripping of people, condemning them to death by starvation.”<sup>159</sup>

In the early stages of Operation Restore Hope, the US clearly wanted to avoid involvement in the political restructuring of Somalia.<sup>160</sup> Unfortunately the Bush administration did not provide clear guidance specifying how to prevent the varied gangs and clans from interfering with relief operations without committing the US to assist in political solution for Somalia for long term stability. As events unfolded, the operation inevitably required US involvement in disarmament of the gangs and factions that threatened safe delivery of food in order to achieve its humanitarian relief task. US forces conducting raids and searching houses to seize weapons, coupled with lack of a viable institutional police force, forced US policy in Somalia to shift, albeit unintentionally. First, when Envoy Oakley met with faction leaders to negotiate for the safe passage of food aid in the cities and outlying rural areas, he established for these militia leaders a pseudo political legitimacy – he gave them perceived political power. Second, Oakley made decisions that led to an increase in US engagement in civil tasks, such as policing the streets of Mogadishu, clearing roads and building airports. These events and actions eventually “had long term political consequences that should have been carefully considered in advance;” they clearly were not in line with Bush’s going in policy.<sup>161</sup>

As the relief operation developed over time and as more US troops were dispatched to Somalia, the US political aim ostensibly did not initially shift from its humanitarian orientation; but it was no longer going to be a quickly in and out event. In order to achieve “decisive” results, an operation of indeterminate length was necessary to “stay the course.” As US

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>159</sup> President George Bush as quoted in the *Washington Post*, 5 Dec 1992, A-19. This text was found in Lyons, 34.

<sup>160</sup> Lyons, 39-69.

Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin stated On 27 August 1993, "we went there to save the people, and we succeeded. We are staying there now to help those same people rebuild their nation," but a time limit for successful execution was not imposed.<sup>162</sup>

Meanwhile local militia leaders remained bent on retaining their power while the international community struggled to implement a feasible coherent strategy necessary for promoting long-term stability in Somalia. To keep power, militia leaders sanctioned armed violence that frequently threatened the safe delivery of food as well as the security of UN and US troops. This violence eventually forced the shift in policy from strictly humanitarian relief to combat operations. Specifically, evidence linking Aideed, a clan leader and recognized major player in the Somali political reconciliation process, to attacks on UN troops and sanctioned feeding centers generated activity that shaped emergent US political aims in Somalia. Based on this evidence, the US supported military efforts to capture Aideed; however, the efforts to capture him resulted in an increase in the number of US casualties in Somalia. Consequently, US domestic pressure against the US intervention in Somalia also rose. When television media displayed the brutal treatment US soldiers following a failed attempt to seize Aideed on 3 October 1993, the US public reaction was strong. As Thomas Friedman stated, "Americans were told that their soldiers were being sent to work in a soup kitchen and they were understandably shocked to find them in house-to-house combat."<sup>163</sup> Again US policy shifted, only this time US forces disengaged in March 1994 and the US (and other UN members) left behind a nation not rebuilt at all.

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>162</sup> Secretary of Defense Les Aspin's remarks were taken from his speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 27 Aug 1993. Quoted in Lyons, 58.

<sup>163</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, "The World: Harm's Way: U.S. Pays Dearly for an Education in Somalia," *New York Times*, 10 October 1993, E1, as quoted in Lyons, 59.

The events in Somalia clearly illustrate that “strategic guidance is heavily influenced by international and domestic political considerations ...[and] may prevent or more typically narrow the range of a commander’s operational alternatives.”<sup>164</sup> Shifting policy during the course of an operation can create operational friction that can cause delay in or deletion of the rapid and decisive attainment of stated objectives.<sup>165</sup> In Somalia for example, the haste with which forces deployed to provide for humanitarian relief created operational friction that impacted on the attainment of the emergent strategic goal of providing security to support nation building. In short, the type and density of troops initially deployed to Somalia was not adequate for the types of combat operations eventually required of them. As Lyons pointed out,

Given the more immediate and dramatic imperative to facilitate the unprecedented [and rapid] movement of U.S. military forces and humanitarian aid with very little time or preparation, [Special US Envoy] Oakley... had to make deals with any leader who had the power to prevent smooth deployment or to resist with sufficient force to cause [US] casualties.<sup>166</sup>

Similarly, Mark Bowden, in his book *Black Hawk Down*, pointed out that “the Clinton administration had been more concerned about maintaining the correct political posture than force protection.”<sup>167</sup> Bowden argued that the unavailability of these systems contributed to the loss of US lives in Somalia and, as previously shown, the rise of US casualties led to the withdrawal of US forces in Somalia before conditions to ensure long term stability were achieved. In this humanitarian operation, therefore, the speed of operations arguably counted or

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<sup>164</sup> Jablonsky, 9.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>166</sup> Lyons, 42.

<sup>167</sup> Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down* (New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999), 335.

less than the force required.<sup>168</sup>

Second, the nature of the conflict can prevent the military from achieving objectives to support attainment of political goals in a rapid and decisive fashion. Strategists and operational level leaders must recognize that political objectives shape and are shaped by the nature of the conflict and the nature of the conflict is shaped by the means available to prosecute warfare. Acclaimed Russian military historian and theorist, Aleksandr A. Svechin in his book, *Strategy*, reminded “the political goal should be appropriate to one’s war waging capabilities.”<sup>169</sup> To more accurately determine the nature of the upcoming war, prudent operational level leaders must view the possible conflict from both sides. Failure to look very closely at an anticipated conflict from both perspectives can result in a miscalculation of the benefits of applying force rapidly – battles may be won, but the war, relative to the political aim, lost.

During his discussion of attrition versus destruction in *Strategy*, Svechin, described an environment that supports use of an RDO-like concept. Select conditions: good lines of communication, significant superiority of forces, and an “hostile state whose political structure resembles a giant with feet of clay, ...favor a destructive [military] strike and make it possible to end war very quickly with minimal expenditure of material and human lives.”<sup>170</sup> The US execution of Operation Just Cause in 1989 illustrates well a scenario that supports a rapid decisive operation. First, the political objectives were clear. Second, superior situational awareness and relatively short air and sea lines of communication enabled multiple-simultaneous strikes by forces in country or within reach without a significant a force build up. In the end, the

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<sup>168</sup> Harnden, 1. With regard to lessons perceived as being learned from observing Operation Iraqi Freedom, Harnden states, “Speed of action is at the center of the new thinking.” Furthermore, “speed is now deemed [by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld] to matter more than the size of the force.” Given the debacle in Somalia, speed was perhaps less important. Likewise, mass is a principle of war; speed is not; thus both should be considered thoroughly before decisions to employ forces are made. .

<sup>169</sup> Aleksandr A Svechin, *Strategy*, ed. Kent D. Lee (Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1991), 91.

rapid joint military operation against the Panamanian Defense Force was successful and forced Manuel Noriega's ultimate collapse. In doing so, Panama was deemed safe for Americans, the integrity of the Panama Canal was ensured and military conditions were set for a stable environment necessary for the freely elected Endarda Government to operate.<sup>171</sup>

However, the operational conditions that contributed to the success of Operation Just cause are not necessarily germane to other scenarios. Of obvious note is the proximity of Panama to the United States homeland. The distance between the US and Panama allowed for the relatively secure basing and preparation of US combat forces for deployment. Forward staging bases and build up forces in tactical assembly areas in nearby countries, key elements of operational level plans in other areas, were not required. While, this lack of a signature of US force build up contributed to the surprise and shock of the rapid strike from joint US forces in Panama, it cannot be guaranteed elsewhere. Again, Turkey's denial for use of its bases by the US military during Operation Iraqi Freedom serves as a solid example to illustrate the reality of diplomacy based military tension.

Svechin also argued that states with relatively weak armies, such as those that the RDO concept appears oriented on, often wage long wars. Svechin concluded,

in practice, the difficulty of clarifying the nature of a coming war will probably lead to a compromise between a quick destructive strike and prolonged war of attrition in the political statement establishing the political goal of the war, and the preparations for war will also contain a compromise between preparations for quick operations by a portion of one's forces and the opposite tendency to enable prolonged conflict.<sup>172</sup>

Certainly, the US cannot guarantee each of the scenarios that it could potentially operate in will support a rapid decisive operation. Potential adversaries will likely learn from our

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>171</sup> LTC James H. Embrey, "Operation Just cause: Concepts for Shaping Future Rapid Decisive Operations" (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 8 April 2002), 3-5.

recent operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq and adapt ways to counter our technological advantages.<sup>173</sup> The range of tactical options available to US opponents include the use of suicide bombers and paramilitary forces that blend in well with the local population thus taking advantage of their “home field.” Future adversaries may not be constrained by time and will attempt to defeat [US] will by using asymmetric attacks, denying [US] access, and if necessary, drawing the [US] into prolonged, slow, and indecisive operations.”<sup>174</sup>

Third, translating diffused strategic guidance into measurable actions also challenges the alleged broad utility of the RDO concept. Today’s operational commanders must frequently take broad and unclear direction from the national political and military leadership and translate it into specific military action to be taken by tactical commanders.<sup>175</sup> Understanding the political objective is central for the operational level commander’s success. “The political object –the original motive for the war – will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires.”<sup>176</sup> Operational level leaders assign military objectives, coordinate deployment of available forces, and define for tactical commanders, where, when and how to fight. Ultimately, operational level military planners must develop concepts designed to produce a “very precise correspondence between means and ends” – the concept designed must achieve specified political objectives.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Svechin, 97.

<sup>173</sup> JFCOM RDO Whitepaper, V2.0, 4-5.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>175</sup> Newell, *The Framework of Operational Warfare*, 18.

<sup>176</sup> Clausewitz, 81.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 126.

Understanding the linkage between the operational aim and the strategic goal forms a necessary foundation so planners can develop a suitable sequence of actions to generate intended effects against an opponent.<sup>178</sup> In cases where the rapid and decisive defeat of an opponent is the goal, the concept of RDO seems suitable, “subject to the basic condition that policy does not demand what is militarily – that is, practically—impossible.”<sup>179</sup> However, for US operational level planners, the problem is not always so neat as to have a rapid and decisive resolution. Political constraints, physical exigencies are often major determinants that guide what is doable versus what is preferred – they provide limits; they can contribute to operational level friction that impedes a rapid or decisive solution. For example, during Operation Enduring Freedom, General Tommie Franks, Commander Central Command, placed a force cap that constrained the number of US personnel operating inside the boundaries of Afghanistan to 7000. Limited strategic airlift, limited infrastructure, and GEN Franks’ concern for force protection drove him to impose strict limits on the number of personnel deployed.<sup>180</sup> Additionally, political factors shaped this constraint. According to LTC Stephen Russell, a planner in US Army Forces Central Command headquarters,

At the time of Tora Bora, LTG Mikoloshek, CFLCC Commander, felt that the risk in using TF 58 far exceeded its benefits as we had every indication that Afghan General Ali would quit the field if large numbers of US forces arrived. Politically, this could have been a disaster as a forced liberation of Kandahar by US forces would not have provided the catalyst necessary for pro-Karzai tribal

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<sup>178</sup> Dixon, 5.

<sup>179</sup> Jablonsky, 9.

<sup>180</sup> LTC Stephen Russell was a planner in US Army Forces Central Command headquarters during the first year of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan. These remarks were captured from an interview between MAJ Shelly Walker, USA, a graduate student in the Advanced Military Studies Program (AMSP), at Ft Leavenworth Kansas. Walker was conducting research for her monograph, “Fog, Friction, and Force Caps,” which examined the impacts of force caps on contemporary operations April 2003. In this case, Russell shared his frustration with the impacts force cap constraints had on operations. In general, force caps dictated many units became ad hoc structures, composed of many soldiers and leaders who had not trained together. From Russell’s perspective, the force cap limits imposed was not necessary.

support in the mostly Pashtun region... The unique unconventional nature of the war, combined with the impacts of introducing large numbers of conventional force, weighed heavily on the decisions made by the leadership. But as to the numbers that they could introduce at Rhino, this seemed to us to stem from force caps imposed by GEN Franks to reduce the footprint or perception of large conventional forces in a region that we still hoped would generate its own friendly forces for a better post-conflict make up.<sup>181</sup>

Arguably, a larger land force inside Afghanistan could have increased the number of options for the operational commander, at the time LTG Mikoloshek, to include striking a greater number of objectives simultaneously, more rapidly. Russell stated, "one expects such friction from the results of enemy action, but to do it to ourselves is another matter altogether."<sup>182</sup> As of April 2003, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan continues.

Ideally, clear, unambiguous objectives are provided to the operational planners that must design and apply operational level warfighting concepts; however, this should not always be expected. Recent reality has shown that senior leaders establish constraints, change policy midstream, and can limit resources available to prosecute a fight. Furthermore, adaptive enemies have demonstrated ways to counter the US edge in technology and are likely pursuing means to increase their technological capabilities. Each of these factors can cause friction that can threaten rapid and decisive achievement of the stated objectives. Acting speedily, but failing to keep a clear political aim in focus can result in unintended consequences. For example, while deterrence of armed conflict may be the stated goal, the effect of rapidly deploying combat force into a specific area could result in an unintended escalation of violence.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, where political or physical factors impose limits to a rapid decisive operation, military leaders must

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<sup>181</sup> Russell, interview remarks.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Bouchard, 51-67.



seek either relaxation of the constraints and restrictions, or adjustment of the stated political goal. Operational artists must be prepared to describe what is empirically possible—their goal must be to ensure that the operational concept is feasible as well as suitable. The ends, ways, and means must be kept in balance. While the US military is arguably equipped with the resources and technology to apply decisive force for quick results, there clearly are times when it must choose to be more patient.<sup>184</sup> Thus, a one size, single approach to warfare based concept, as RDO claims to be, is not sufficiently comprehensive for application at the operational level acceptable; and this is what the US leaders need to hear.

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<sup>184</sup> Hoffman, 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion and Recommendations

It is distinctly American to believe that wars should be unmistakably winnable and to be intolerant of apparently indecisive operations.<sup>185</sup>

Colin Gray

The United States may drive the revolution in military affairs, but only if it has a clear conception of what it wants its military power for – which it does not now have.<sup>186</sup>

Eliot Cohen.

### Conclusions

Certainly, the United States should exploit information technology to improve its style of warfare. Better communication, transportation and weapons systems can provide leverage for shifting the relative balance of friction in one's favor. For example, technology can assist military commanders at all levels by improving upon their situational awareness of the battlefield; at the tactical level this is especially powerful. "Total battle-space transparency can allow decisive actions in combat."<sup>187</sup> But improving battlefield situational awareness is not equivalent to an elimination of friction at the operational level of war. "At the operational level the emphasis has to be on a series of battles which constitute a campaign. The emphasis is not on a single battle; it is not even on battle itself. Battle, or fighting, is the concern of the tactical commander alone."<sup>188</sup> For operational commanders, technology cannot guarantee basing rights for US forces; technology cannot guarantee clear understanding of political aims nor can

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<sup>185</sup> Gray, 34.

<sup>186</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, "A Revolution in Warfare," reprinted with permission from *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 75, No.2 (March/ April 1996); Richard K. Betts, ed. *Conflict After the Cold War* (New York, NY: Pearson Education Inc., 2002), 511.

<sup>187</sup> Harknett, 525.

<sup>188</sup> GEN Glenn K. Otis, as quoted in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, "The Commanders View" in *On Operational Art* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1994), 33.

technology guarantee an understanding of what the RDO authors mean in their Whitepaper.

The problem, simply stated, is that having the same information does not necessarily lead actors to reach the same conclusion about how to respond. A president will view information through political-strategic lenses; the field commander, through operational lenses; and soldiers, through tactical and personal lenses.<sup>189</sup>

In this monograph, analysis has shown that understanding what is meant by rapid and decisive operations in JFCOM's August 2001 RDO Whitepaper is not easy. First, the RDO concept does not provide clear definitions for the terms decisive and rapid. Second, the RDO White paper appears to be filled with contradictions and inconsistencies regarding its use of the terms rapid and decisive. Third, the terms rapid and decisive contain a degree of imprecision when applied to full spectrum operations. The concept's emphasis on the modifier *absolutely rapid* illustrates the point. The document clearly signals two different messages when it states RDO is both absolutely rapid and yet, during the concept's discussion of the two interrelated phases of RDO, the first phase of RDO is of indeterminate length. The term rapid reflects a degree of measurement of one object relative to another. Perhaps what the RDO concept is really arguing is that the length of an operation is "absolutely indeterminable," because as shown, friction has a vote in warfare.

In war, no operation can be absolutely rapid simply because all activity in war is relative. Warfare is interactive; it is "nothing but a duel on a larger scale;" it is "always the collision of two living forces."<sup>190</sup> The speed of activity in warfare and the effects achieved from that speed is always measured against an opponent's response; it is always relative. For operational planners any reference to absoluteness can create tension and can lead to unrealistic expectations of how an operation should be planned and executed. Thus, the RDO concept's imprecise and

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<sup>189</sup> Harknett, 530.

inconsistent use of the terms rapid and decisive can create confusion and can potentially cause operational level planners to develop inappropriate military courses of action to meet strategic aims.

Similarly, application of the RDO concept across the full spectrum of operations is not always feasible, suitable, or acceptable. According to contemporary US Joint doctrine, at the operational level, campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters or other operational areas. While determining which are the best forces to use and ensuring they are available for employment in order to accomplish the strategic aim is arguably one of the operational level planner's critical tasks, for operational planners, keeping the strategic aim in focus is essential.<sup>191</sup> Clearly, history's recent past has shown where the military expediency of rapidly employing overwhelming decisive force was not physically feasible nor was it the best use of the US military's capabilities to accomplish the desired political objectives. Although presented as a concept that addresses conflict throughout the continuum of war, the concept's published focus on the rapid employment of overwhelming combat power in small-scale contingencies clearly masks challenges to its universal applicability. In the foreseeable future, there will likely be many political-military scenarios, such as those that require peacekeeping operations, where application of the RDO concept does not serve to attain strategic aims. In short, the RDO concept is not sound as an alleged full-spectrum tool for application at the operational level of war.

## **Recommendations**

This study first recommends that the US joint force community recognize that the RDO concept is not a sound concept for application at the operational level of war. As a tool to guide

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<sup>190</sup> Clausewitz, 75, 77.

<sup>191</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 5-0, Doctrine for Planning Joint Operations* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 13 April 1995), I-2.

US joint force operations across the full spectrum of warfare, its published focus on offensively oriented operations and joint battle makes its scope too narrow to be of real value to operational planners. As currently written, the RDO concept “tends to tie the hands of the NCA by permitting only one kind of response to any number of smaller scale contingencies.”<sup>192</sup> Also, its assertions that sequential operations are a thing of the past are not supported by recent history. In general, it is not sufficiently comprehensive to address the many and varied politically – military situations operational level planners can potentially face in the near future. At best, the RDO concept seems better suited to support revision of tactical warfighting doctrine, stressing the use of technology to enhance situational awareness on modern battlefields. At the tactical level, making decisions more quickly than the enemy is generally considered better, at the operational level of war, better is better.

Secondly, this study recommends that the RDO concept be rewritten. Again, this is not a polemic against exploiting technology to improve US warfighting capability. Rather, it is an appeal to those whom write operational concepts to truly recognize what are the limitations of information-age technologies. It is clear that the “increasingly complex demands made by modern forces and by modern warfare has witnessed an explosion in the data processed by any given command system to carry out the mission. As this quantity for data [rises], the difficulty in interpreting it in preparation for decision making is also growing.”<sup>193</sup> Modern warfare is certainly filled with friction and technology can help to reduce some of the friction US forces may face. However, technology cannot eliminate the friction generated from the political military tension inherent at the operational level of war. Nor can technology mitigate the challenge to understanding what the RDO concept is all about.

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<sup>192</sup> Echevarria, 14.

<sup>193</sup> Van Creveld, *Command in War*, 3.

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